

**PLOTINUS**  
**THE TERM AND THE WAY**



*THEORY OF ART AND BEAUTY*



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*Dedicated to  
Skaidrite Liemanis*

*To whom this work owes  
its realization*

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## ABSTRACT

The *Aesculapia* at Epidauros introduces us to the search for spiritual laws regulating the universe. Meditations on the eternal forms, the beauty of ideas, *cosmos*, nature and art are important constituents of an authentically lived human world.

Various approaches to the idea of beauty and art are examined. The idea of the sublime in nature is contrasted to the holy in art. The religious or existential relationship between *theos*, culture and the arts is introduced.

Ammonius Saccas instructs Plotinus towards a synthesis of ancient Greek philosophy. A brief introduction to the historical Plotinus is offered. The Hypostases: The One or Supreme Reality, the Divine Mind, *Nous*, and the Universal Soul, *Logos*, are discussed in the context of Plato's eternal ideas, Beauty, Truth and Good.

Dialectic, that "precious part of philosophy", must wait for art to provide structures of judgement. Aesthetic judgement opens the way into our meditation on beauty and art. Subjective judgement is examined in relation to its objective reference. Metaphysics of specific unity is presented. Plotinian *meta-noia* is summarized.

An examination of the dialogue Plotinus has with art and beauty is offered. The relationship between Plato's divine intelligibles and art is discussed in context of the treatise *On Beauty*. The intelligible beauty of ideas, *cosmos*, nature and art are examined in context of the treatise *On Intellectual Beauty*. Plotinian theory of art is summarized.

Plotinus advances an "iconic" dialectic that serves his theological theory of art. The more important critical issues that arise from his description of the realm of art are addressed. Plotinian mysticism, and the subject of matter and form, identity and difference, is discussed. The opposing ways of the "picture" and the "word" are briefly summarized.

The appearance of *theos* is an event of *hierophany*. The meaning of art points towards the object of our ultimate concern. Plotinian theory of art advances upon appropriation and affinity, a theory of human creativity that is examined in relation to an existential will to meaning. Radical paradigms for human life, culture and the arts are provided. A Plotinian studio program for the painter concludes the thesis.

## RÉSUMÉ

L'*Aesculapia* de Épidaure nous initie à la recherche des lois spirituelles qui régissent l'univers. Les méditations sur les formes éternelles et sur la beauté des idées, du *cosmos*, de la nature et de l'art sont des constituents importants d'un monde humain vécu de façon authentique.

Les diverses interprétations de l'idée de la beauté et de l'art est présenté. L'idée du sublime de la nature est mise en contraste avec celle du sacré dans l'art. Le lien religieux ou existentiel entre *théos*, culture et art est présenté.

Plotin reçoit des enseignements d'Ammonius Saccas en vue de faire une synthèse de l'ancienne philosophie grecque. L'histoire de Plotin est brièvement rappelée. Les Hypostases: l'Un ou la Réalité Suprême, l'Intellect Divin, le *Nous*, et l'Âme Universelle, le *Logos*, sont analysées dans le contexte des idées éternelles de Platon: Beauté, Vérité, et Bien.

La dialectique, "cette partie précieuse de la philosophie", est tributaire de la beauté de l'art pour structurer le jugement. Le jugement esthétique ouvre la voie à la méditation sur la beauté. Le jugement subjectif est examiné sous l'angle de sa référence objective. La métaphysique de l'unité spécifique est abordée et la *meta-noia* plotinienne est résumée.

Le dialogue de Plotin avec l'art et la beauté est examiné en profondeur. Le rapport qu'il établit entre les Intelligibles Divins de Platon et l'art est examiné dans le contexte du traité *De la Beauté*. La beauté intelligible, des idées, du *cosmos*, de la nature et de l'art est examiné dans le contexte du traité *De la Beauté Intellectuelle*. Un résumé est fait de la théorie plotinienne de l'art.

Plotin propose une théorie "iconique" qui va dans le sens de sa théorie théologique de l'art. Les principales questions suscitées par sa description du domaine de l'art sont traitées. Le mysticisme plotinienne et les questions de matière et de forme, d'identité et de différence sont examinées. Les vues opposées sur l'image et le mot sont brièvement passées en revue.

La manifestation du *théos* est un événement *hiérophanique*. La signification de l'art nous oriente vers l'objet de notre préoccupation ultime. La théorie plotinienne de l'art concerne l'appropriation et l'affinité, et donc une théorie de la créativité en rapport avec la volonté existentielle du sens. Ainsi sont définis les paradigmes de la vie humaine, de la culture et des arts. L'étude se termine par l'esquisse d'un programme plotinienne destiné au peintre.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is a development of a Graduate Paper I wrote in 1988 on *The Mystical Elements in Greek Philosophy* for Dr. Leo Groarke, Professor of Philosophy, Wilfrid Laurier University. Adjunct Studies in phenomenology of art were also written in 1989 for Dr. José Huertas-Jourda, Director, *Centre for Advanced Research in Phenomenology*, Wilfrid Laurier University. Insofar as art treats the human condition and our own existential understanding it involves questions of ultimate concern or meaning. This picture became clearer to me while writing an undergraduate course titled *Religion and The Arts* offered in 1984 by Dr. Joseph C. McLelland, Professor of Philosophy of Religion, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, who acted as *Thesis Supervisor* for this my M.A. dissertation.



## INTRODUCTION

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

The relationship between the work of art and the activity of human understanding attests to an artistic development or an advance upon some goal or end, the nature of which has engaged my thinking on art for many years. As creators of an intelligible universe we are responsible. All of us can become more aware of our human potential, how we want to use it, what we want in life and how we want to live it. The goal to which the creative process leads is inextricably bound to our philosophical and theological presumptions. With respect for our task we will discover this ground by way of our dialogue with Plotinus and his meditation on the work of art.

This study addresses the theory of art proposed by Plotinus, a separation of self-assertive logical reasoning and psychological motifs within the unity of a single problem – the question of the meaning of the being of art. Such a task seeks to recover what is still relevant in the ancient myths of a bygone era. Any attempt to assimilate or recover the collective past and give recognition to the fact that our culture and thinking is basically historical comes out of a development that brings us to the concerns of our modern world. This work acknowledges that the problems of our time are not entirely new and that the philosophical synthesis that Plotinus advances may shed new light on ancient versions of our own modern experience.

Besides uncovering the evolutionary stages concomitant to the creation of a work of art, a Plotinian inquiry into the question of the meaning of art has a restorative or therapeutic aim, both at once individual and collective. Ontoanalysis becomes loganalysis, where theory of art is not only concerned with the *ontos* of art, its being, but also with the *logos* of art, its meaning. For

Plotinus, the beauty we perceive in art signifies an existential will to meaning. The essential teaching contained in the *Enneads* is the fact that the individual is fundamentally no different from the Absolute, what Plotinus calls the Divine All-Unity of Primal Beauty, the One. This spiritual awakening is *gnosis*, an immediate event that can be characterized as a second birth or *meta-noia*, effectively a "conversion of consciousness".

The *Enneads* is an outline of the spiritualized Upward Way. It is a collection of treatises that directs the reader through various theologically constituted ontological horizons to affinity and identity with *theos*, an achievement which is not formulated by any effort of conventional thinking. It is important to note at the outset that the *Enneads* work independently of our normal frame of understanding.

The point of these treatises is their iconic presentation and the changes they effect on the innermost reaches of our soul. The Plotinian method of making philosophical statements through mythological images serves an ancient dialectic that presents ideas directly to the imagination. The picture language inherent in the ideogram messages that abide in the *eikōn* are epistemologically prior to the cognates of discursive formulations. The idea that the picture speaks more directly to our understanding than the word is central to the Plotinian undertaking, advancing a radical new way of doing theory of art.

Plotinus does not propose a plan of action in the normal sense of the term. Instead, he proposes a way of actuating hidden and forgotten possibilities. Herein lies the risk for anyone who attempts to integrate parts of the *Enneads* to support arguments that are more particular to theory of art. There always remains the possibility that a selective reading may distort the rest of his thought in the process. I will integrate excerpts of the Plotinian *uni-ate* or unitary way of thinking in such a manner as to allow Plotinus to speak for himself. In so respecting the Plotinian enterprise, critical issues are addressed in the light of more modern assumptions after Plotinus has had his say.

My work advances upon a thematic reflection, united by intent and focuses on the formative features as they unfold. Each chapter follows a close reading of passages cited in the *Enneads*. Our dialogue with Plotinus presents two voices – the *Enneads* and the theory of art integral to its narration. The theory of creativity advanced by Plotinus expresses the one thought that sustains his vision. It is, therefore, my task to present the theory of art that effectively remains hidden in the rather fragmented collection of essays given to us by Porphyry.

Plotinian meditations on the traditional tenets determining the nature of art and beauty are wide ranging. His dialectical ascent to the transcendent constituents of art points towards our affinity with Ultimate Meaning, the Primal Beauty and Supreme Good of the One. By giving structure to his many-layered testimonial, we are reminded that each part of the *Enneads* presupposes knowledge of the whole. An Alexandrian synthesis of the classical Greek tradition in philosophy is his offering, one that nourishes a theory of art that is too often treated as superfluous by both artists and teachers of art alike.

Plotinus ennobles the culture of which he speaks, and he invites the philosopher of art, the theologian and the visual artist to respect the integrity of the work of art, while at the same time honouring its intention by taking seriously its concern for humankind in general. This study seeks to unite diverse Plotinian references, responding both *to* them and *for* them. By giving formal structure to the theory of art advanced in the *Enneads*, we participate in the dialectical Upward Way.



## CHAPTER I: RELIGION AND ART

### ASCENT OF THE SOUL

At Epidauros in Greece we discover the remains of the ancient sanctuary of Aesculapius. Son of Apollo and the nymph Cronis, the centaur Chiron taught him the art of medicine. Aesculapius is characterized as compassionate and kind, one who strives to alleviate human suffering. Here is the most famous healing centre of the ancient world, effecting cures not only in physical health but also in the mental realm of *psyche* or soul.

The *Aesculapia* at Epidauros was a religious institution of higher learning marked by great achievement in the spiritual reformation of its inhabitants. It lasted from the sixth century B.C.E. to the end of the fifth century C.E. The High Priests who were not primarily physicians had advanced the search for and comprehension of the spiritual laws regulating the universe, towards a science of *nootherapia* or "mind healing".<sup>1</sup> These hierophant priests claimed knowledge about the great influence the natural order of things had upon mental and physical well-being. Good health and a balanced mind opened one to the unlimited potential of a sanctified way of being in the world, restorative to the human soul, toward its full and authentic power.

Perfection of the practical methods for the application of this knowledge was achieved at the temple compound. It was by knowing the means to introduce the individual to the truth of being that Aesculapius established the art of individuation, dialectical meditations that leads to an existential affinity with the *eikōi* or "holy images" of *mythopoietic* understanding.<sup>2</sup> Individuals received intellectual sustenance through the high spirituality of the attending priests and were moved to wonder on the beauty of their mountain top location. Residents were encouraged to contemplate their everyday ways, beliefs and attitudes and were directed through the rigours of dialectic and physical exercise towards recovery of a more natural and meaningful human existence. Recovery of the Ideal Archetype or Authentic Self was considered successful



only when the full range of human experience was recollected to the unitary faculty of the Transcendent Function.

The body could be practically healed with various naturopathic medicines, but this physical cure was only a temporary remedy of something symptomatic of something else. The more consummate causes of maladies of the body were said to dwell in the mind. The physical problem was removed by medical intervention, but new disorders in other parts of the body would most certainly reappear. In addition to this medical procedure, the attending priests used the harmonic rhythms of music, dance and poetry for their character-building efficacy and for the immediate healing influence they asserted on both mind and body.<sup>3</sup> The rigours of gymnastics and athletics were also employed.

Art was considered an important factor in the elevation of the human spirit.<sup>4</sup> Meditations on the beauty of sculpture, painting and poetry were an integral part of the ascent of the soul. It was believed that active contemplation of art brings forth from every individual an authentically human, existential response.

The healing that occurred in the individual may be seen as the natural outcome of our meditation on the cosmogonic creativity of a transcendently constituted self-perceiving intellect. A spiritual awakening or *gnosis* was said to occur, through which individuals identified and became fully aware of their true being and authentic human nature. The existential condition of becoming authentically human is inevitable in every human life and perhaps destined in every culture and civilization. In Plotinus we have a similar courageous attempt to preserve and enhance the dignity of humankind.

## **IDEAS ON ART AND BEAUTY**

The conceptual reference intended by our development of the theory of art integral to the *Enneads* enters upon ideas descriptive of Art, Beauty and Ultimate Meaning. To this end the Platonic forms Beauty, Truth and the Good are discussed in the context of their Plotinian reference. The eternal ideas so described are called transcendental in that they are the archetypes from which

all objective statements are constituted. They are the universal ideas that give structure and meaning to our world, signifying the ground on which everything that *is* is in some way subject to the transcendent operations of aesthetic judgement. Plotinus presents us with the one thought, to the proposition that predicates the assertion, Beauty *is* Truth *is* Good. The logic that informs his assertion is the one idea that intends dialectic of the absolute and the relative, the objective and the subjective, the universal and its particular reference.

Plato gives us the divinely constituted ideal forms, the eternal ideas. Plotinus finds these intellectual forms discoverable in the sensible world. Beauty, Truth and the Good are described as exemplar paradigms, collectively endowed with Ultimate Meaning. In so saying, he retains the traditional meaning of beauty as *kalon*, "that which pleases", and dismisses as too narrow the concepts that understood beauty as *mimesis*, "imitation", and *techne*, "skill in production", advanced by Plato. It is only later that aesthetics tends to view beauty as aesthetic value.

Beauty meant for the ancient Greeks something quite different from our modern understanding of the term. *Kalon* or beauty designated "that which pleases" as *harmonia* or "harmony of mind". It is to a beautiful mind that *kalon* ultimately refers. Out of this rather wide interpretation there came more specific concepts of the beautiful. The poets spoke of the *harmonia* of *cosmos* and the sculptors, painters and architects spoke of *symmetria* and good proportion.

Platonic thinking held beauty as an objective quality, not the subjective experience of pleasurable things. The essence of beauty is measure and proportion, the *symmetria* of Pythagorean harmony. Beauty and the virtue of goodness are here synonymous for they express our relationship with the ancient gods. Plato contemplated the truth of beauty from within this context, recognizing in Egyptian art its authentic expression, canonized by the "doing of a god, or a godlike man". In his final statements on the subject of art, Plato realizes the truth of what he has seen.<sup>5</sup>

CLINIAS: And in Egypt itself, now – pray how has the law regulated the matter of things?

ATHENIAN: The mere report will surprise you. That nation, it would seem, long ago recognized the truth we are now affirming, that poses and melodies must be good, if they are to be habitually practised by the youthful generation of citizens.

So they drew up the inventory of all the standard types, and consecrated specimens of them in their temples. If you inspect their painting and reliefs on the spot, you will find that the work of ten thousand years ago – I mean the expression not loosely but in all precision – is neither better nor worse than that of today; both exhibit an identical artistry.

CLINIAS: A most amazing state of things! (*Laws II*, 656)

It is no wonder that Plotinus will turn to the authority of the Egyptians for the ultimate meaning that art provides. Concepts that flow out of the ideas that art presents are disclosures of the universality of their objective content, achieved by the unveiling structures of *alētheia* or Truth.

Generally speaking, art refers to an object judged to be beautiful. Further reduction to "fine" art consigns the term to the objects of painting or sculpture. The ancient Greek word for art or "craft" was *techne*, "skill in making", and was not confined to describing the skill inherent in the production of art. The first great dialogues on art are found in Plato, where *techne* retains its reference to skill. The artisan is here meant to enter into an act of *mimesis* or "imitation" of nature. Here too art images beauty as *kalos*, "harmony of mind" necessary to its production. Art helps us image the archetypal model that constitutes its epistemological framework, an image that holds this transcendently shaped intellectual object undiminished both in the mind of the artist and in the work of art produced.

Artistic production ennobles natural generation, bestowing being on a sensible world in the image of its objective cause. The ideas that art present cannot be discovered outside the subject matter with which they deal. Art presupposes certain logical structures of aesthetic judgement that enable some things to be called beautiful. Art constitutes an intellectual object in the mind of the artificer, the Plotinian term for visual artist, meaningfully structured

and embodied formally and then concretely realized. In so doing, the realm of Art and Nature are differentiated. Art is a creative process that transcends the generative acts of Nature, testifying to the power of human creativity and to the freedom of its making.

The popular notion that art gives aesthetic form, shape, line and colour to the visible world is but one aspect of its meaning. Art also refers to the operations of the creative unconscious and intuitive imagination. Plotinus describes this relational feature between the eternal ideas and their sensible products as their "meaning-structure". The *phenomena* of the world participate with the archetypal patterning of the *noumena*. The idea that art has a distinct ontological status dwells in the notion that the ideal activates the sensible in a formative way. The intellectual formulation inherent in the production of a work of art gives psychological shape to the Transcendent Function always operative in the mind of the artist.

The terms form and idea are somewhat interchangeable. They exist only as ideal contents of the mind. Ideas in this sense are distinguished from Plato's eternal forms. An idea in its general sense is that which refers to the Platonic form. The transcendental form applies to its archetypal structure, which is known through the first property of the soul, the intuitive intellect. The form of an idea signifies the transcendental object, not the idea conceptually formulated. It is the image of the thought. By imitating the eternal ideas, the works of art produced by the visual artist demonstrate characteristics of the ideal forms we intuit in them. When we discern a relationship between the work of art and the ideas they embody we apprehend the eternal forms themselves. The ideal form remains outside the human mind, as the ideas are separate from their substantive imitations.

When we comprehend things through the operations of the intuitive intellect we live the forms they imitate. Plotinus changes the meaning of *mimesis*, superseding traditional understanding of the term "imitation" as involving a correspondence or resemblance between two sensible things, the

work of art and the object of its intention. He opens the relation between the artist and the work produced to include the operations of a divinely constituted imagination.

## THEORY OF ART

Aesthetics is generally distinguished by two fundamental concepts, that of art and beauty. On the other hand, theory of art lays significance on the basic problems of aesthetics generally – questions on the nature of art and beauty, aesthetic value, aesthetic judgement, the Holy in art, and the relationship of art to truth and ultimate meaning. Theory of art analyzes the basic assumptions of aesthetics and examines their internal consistency together with their apparent reasonableness.

The purpose of our work is to open the generic characteristics of a theory of art that predisposes upon the *Enneads* and integrate their objects with other aspects of human culture such as philosophy, psychology, mythology and religion. Understood in this way, Plotinian theory of art is distinguished from both aesthetics and the historical study of art, which is concerned not with art as such but with the development of taste, styles and schools, its iconography and iconology.<sup>6</sup>

The ancient Greeks saw little connection between art and beauty. A separate rhetoric was developed for each field of inquiry and was only later brought together in the modern sense. For the contemporary reader it is almost impossible to disassociate the two ideas. The two theoretical intentions are generally thought together. Classical aesthetics embraces study of the work of art and the beauty of its content. Plotinian theory of art demonstrates the formative aspects that art and religion gives to culture and its institutions.

The main question concerns the existence of beautiful things. We begin with Primal Beauty, first quality of the Absolute, an intellectual activity that formulates and gives meaning to our relation with other human beings in the world. Plotinus holds that beauty of every kind "issues" from its eternal archetype and traces the beauty he perceives in Nature and Art to its divine

source. Art possesses "shape" and reason to the extent that it participates with the Divine All-Unity of its "gathering", for it has some share in its efficacy. When Plotinus refers to beauty through the Good it connects to a reconstituted *ethos* or "lived condition", judgement of beauty as the "natural order of things". When reference to beauty is made through Truth, Beauty itself becomes the object of sublime contemplation.

The sublime refers to an "aesthetic value", the primary constituent of our experience of transcendent vastness and greatness of power. The sublime names the awe we experience when the magnitudes of natural forces overwhelm us. However, natural elements are not the objects of the sublime. The sublime is an intellectual experience, a state of mind that attempts to come to terms with the totality that nature presents. The sublime is both at once apprehended to be of this world and experienced as something beyond it, even greater than the whole of its presence. The sublime transcends all normal standards of judgement. We are presented with an immanent something that is even greater than the tremendous power of nature. Mortal existence opens to a realm of infinite grandeur, an experience filled with awe, fear and limitation. We concomitantly experience an elevation of the human spirit to its rightful place as participant with an objectified sacred reality.

The earliest extant determination of the sublime as a distinct concept is ascribed to Longinus, teacher of Porphyry, before he studied with Plotinus.<sup>7</sup> In modern aesthetics, it was given to Kant to distinguish the sublime as a separate category of beauty, making it apply properly only to the intellect and not to the object through which it appears.<sup>8</sup>

## THE HOLY IN ART

The sublime also enters theory of art under the heading "aesthetic quality". Reference to the more intimate structures of the sublime serve well a theory of art that advances its divine or sacred nature. The concept of the sublime is an important way of entering into the basic experiences of the human soul, for it is an account of an encounter that exceeds our normal perceptual grasp, defying

traditional tenets of both art and beauty. Despite the failure of the synthesizing power of the intellect, our condition as free existential beings sanctions us to participate with the sheer magnitude of the sublime through our experience of a naturally occurring *noumenon*. We become aware of a personal valuation that cannot be threatened. This dual quality of the sublime is analogous to our experience of the sacred and the profane. A religious note is never very far from the concept of the sublime.

Rudolf Otto describes the existential attributes of the sacred as experience of the Holy, an image that embraces the *mysterium tremendum*, that awesome uncertainty we feel in the presence of the All-Unity of the Nature-Principle. The Holy expresses our experience of the *numinous*, from the Latin *numen*, "divine".<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the historical development of *theos* engages ideas that refer to the more fearful aspects of the ancient gods. Consistent with the emergence of concepts of deity as being both morally perfect and good, the Holy becomes profoundly charged with value.

The ineffable Parmenidean One remains secluded in the Sanctuary of Mystery. In a phenomenological sense, our experience of the *numinous* further makes immanent a distinct experience of an infinite *theos*, paradoxically presenting itself to our finite world. Plotinian theory of art constitutes a manner of thinking that transcends the parallel constituency of its content. It is a way of doing theory of art that has its source in infinity, the birth of perspective, the continuum of space and time. One always refers to the other, the sacred and the profane, a validity that unites the Plotinian approach to discourse on the meaning of the being of art.

The universal ascent of art in human civilization testifies to a culture that collectively grounds its ideas in concepts that are first objectively given to mythological imagination and then ontologically structured for their theological meaning. Plotinian theory of art shares in the rationally consistent *Logos* or "meaning-structure" at its nucleus, giving rise to the ultimate meaning that art brings to human understanding. To fully appreciate the dialectical synthesis

that Plotinus brings to theory of art, it is best to understand his dialogue with art as a creative expression of his ultimate concern, its existential voice.

Art is not unlike the religious ground that structures and gives meaning to the culture that sustains its *ethos*, for it too is ultimately concerned about human being and the world in which we dwell, as well as its ultimate meaning. Art puts the theological question radically. It has the power to face the situation out of which the question of cultural content arises, namely the human condition.<sup>10</sup> The autonomous institutions that art nourishes are profane images of a transcendently constituted divine mandate. The beauty we perceive in a work of art signifies a sacred transcendent realm, one that sustains and gives meaningful expression to our cultural institutions. Art exists in order to wholly transpose the window through which human experience is assimilated, a sphere that participates with the eternal "dance-play" of the Universal Soul, that which gives ultimate meaning to our very human place in the larger scheme of things.





## CHAPTER II: THE TERM

### PREAMBLE

The growth of Greek philosophy may be interpreted as a process that increasingly rationalized the theological or religious formulations implicit in the ancient myths. Cosmology described a pantheon inhabited by the gods, a time in human history when allegory served as handmaiden to philosophy.

The transition from *poietic* understanding to rational description and logical propositions was a gradual process. Philosophy employed the language of *mythos* to make philosophical statements about the origin of *cosmos* and about the universal principles accounting for its operation. The ancient myths advanced a manner of thinking that imaged the divine realm of *theos* through recognizable metaphor. Broadly characterized, we can speak of a movement in thinking through three basic stages: The *cosmos*-centred or unitary, the *anthropos*-centred or subjective, and the *theos*-centred or objective.

Early Greek philosophy developed around a faith that in the apparent chaos of the universe there lay concealed a permanent and intelligible order that could be accounted for by universal laws operating within nature. A new optimism reasoned these laws were discoverable through the powers of human intellect. There was a gradual rejection of the traditions of ancient learning. The achievement of abandoning divine agencies for physical causes operating in the natural world was indeed a remarkable advance in rational thinking.

Pursuant to their intellectual effort, philosophical thinking made formidable advances through Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, until a clear notion of what was meant by soul, the ideal and the sensible, matter and form, mind and body, had risen out of the distant echoes of a forgotten mythology. Werner Jaeger renders a portrait of this ascent as follows:

Picture this process as the gradual shading of a great circle, in smaller concentric circles from the circumference to the centre. Then it is rational thinking which invades the circle of a mysterious universe, taking possession of it more and more deeply, until in Plato and Socrates it reaches the centre, which is the human soul. From that point, the movement spreads back again until we reach the end of ancient philosophy in Neoplatonism.<sup>11</sup>

Consciousness of a transcendent power had begun to prevail over empirical science, an effectiveness that lay outside the propositions of its methods. Greek culture was, so to speak, already in the process of deconstruction.

An advancing Christian ideology was also having a profound impact upon the very *ethos* of Hellenism. For Plotinus, the soul of Greek culture was being threatened. His concern for the collective advances a most astute psychology of the soul. A new way of thinking enters upon tradition, one that speaks directly to the individual. Philosophy was abandoning the senses, the world of empirical science. It directed itself to the study of a transcendently constituted intellectual realm. Towards this end the ancient myths were recollected and returned to their enduring authority.

Neoplatonism is the last decisive achievement in the historical development of Greek ideas, a culmination in which dialectical synthesis surpasses the determinism of a previous age.<sup>12</sup> This new approach to philosophy was directed towards *theos*, the Godhead. Tradition had, so to speak, consumed itself, its psychological image the circular *uroboros*, symbol of disintegration and re-integration. Thinking had recovered its original ground. The ancient is again new. We are witness to a recollecting or return to a theological or "religious attitude" in philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

Based on Plato's eternal forms, the Neoplatonists constructed a unitary way of thinking, embracing all spheres of existence and thought. They did, however, differ from Plato in many ways. Plotinus presents the divine realm as a unity of *hypostases*. The first *hypostasis*, the One, transcends all being and thought, until it thinks the divine thoughts, Beauty, Truth and the Good. These ideas are the intellectual objects of the Supreme Unaltering. The All-Unity of

existence is named Primal Beauty. (V.8.viii) We are presented with ultimate mystery, an image of "unity-in-plurality", one that gives ultimate meaning to our diverse world. The All-Unity describes itself as *Nous*, the Divine Mind and *Psyche*, the Universal Soul. Both establish the *Logos* as its Ultimate Meaning.<sup>14</sup>

Issues of meaning associated with the terms *Nous* and *Logos* generally point toward an animating principle or structure that orders the universe for our understanding. The term *Nous* is as old as Greek antiquity. Homer used it when referring to the mind and its faculty to think discursively. Pre-Socratic philosophy identified it with knowledge or reason, opposing it to perception. Plato thought the *Nous* as the rational part of the immortal soul, and Aristotle distinguished the intellectual *Nous* from knowledge derived from sense perception. For Plotinus, the *Nous* is the transcendental image of the divine forms, Beauty, Truth and the Good.

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

To appreciate the onto-theological constitution of the Plotinian project, some knowledge of the earlier philosophical doctrines and ideas are important. The wisdom that Plotinus brings to the main metaphysical issues of the day – for example, monism, dualism, the ideal and the sensible, the being of beings, universals and particulars, the one and the many, epistemology, aesthetics and semiotics – attests to a profound understanding of the historical development of Greek thinking up to his time. Some knowledge of the Egyptian hermetic tradition is useful. Plotinus assimilates a wide variety of philosophical views, for he is heir to the great philosophies of the ancient world. His work may be described as a great synthesis of Middle-Eastern thought, together with the whole tradition of Greek philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

Plato described a transcendent realm of ideal forms not of this world. Plotinus carries this transcendental philosophy much further. Eclectic in appearance and method, the *Enneads* remain powerfully united by the strength of his existential concern for the individual soul. Perhaps Plotinus is rightly

regarded as the last great thinker of Antiquity, yet in more than one respect, particularly in his emphasis on the autonomy of the human spirit, he may be regarded as mentor to our own age.<sup>16</sup>

Our effort to trace the historical references to the concepts *Nous* and *Logos* facilitates our entry into the Plotinian synthesis, for we find a relational element in its formulation. Heraclitus described the *Logos* as a governing principle or force identified with the image of fire, a *Logos* that gives rational structure and meaning to the chaos of an irrational universe. The fundamental ideas that enter our dialogue with *cosmos* are introduced: Contemplation on ultimate things, the rational structure of existence, and finally, the source or ground of that rational principle. The *Logos* characterized in this way is an immanent principle, its object transcendentally constituted. Anaxagoras furthered this discussion by recognizing an intelligence in the universe that is not mixed with other things, not totally immanent.

*Anaxagoras, again, in his assertion of a Mind pure and unmixed, affirms a simplex First and a sundered One, though writing long ago he failed in precision. (V.1.viii)*

Plotinus called this intellectual principle the *Nous*. For Plotinus, the eternal forms are the *noumena* of Divine Mind, a realm organized by the transcendent operations of aesthetic judgement. Again, this structure is produced by the *Nous*, not the *Logos*.

The concept *Logos* has also an Alexandrian connection. Philo Judaeus used the term to describe a cosmological feature equated with the image and works of God. The *Logos* is here distinct from its ground, intermediate between *theos* and the world. The *Nous* is already transcendent to the *Logos* – the *Logos* contemplates the divine *Nous*. The latter constitutes the eternal forms, Beauty, Truth and Good. It is the *Logos* that gives structure and meaning the world. *Theos* becomes active through the *Logos*. For Plotinus, the *Logos* is the creative power of the Universal Soul. Just as the One produces the *Nous*, the Divine Mind produces the Universal Soul. Through the *Logos* flows the ineffable power that creates our world.

In the historical development of Greek ideas, the Neoplatonists follow closely on the late second century Neo-Pythagoreans. The influence of Pythagoras on Greek thought is retained through Plato, who adopted his doctrines of immortality of the soul and philosophy as "affinity" to the divine.<sup>17</sup> Neo-Pythagoreanism was an admixture of earlier Pythagorean material with the teachings of Socrates and Plato. Most of the more important ideas were attributed to Pythagoras for he had attained the status of hierophant, "revealer of esoteric religious truths". Pythagorean interest in things spiritual follows through Plato to Plotinus. Notwithstanding, the Neoplatonist school had much more that was original and independent of the tradition which preceded it, bringing the sum total of knowledge into a new philosophic system.

### NEOPLATONISM

As a definite school, Neoplatonism originated in Alexandria, where a mixture of Eastern and Western traditions made for a fusion of wide-ranging philosophical and religious ideas. Its founder was Ammonius Saccas (175-242 C.E.), who was brought up a Christian and then returned to the ways of the ancient gods. He left no written remains, so it is difficult to determine the exact relation Ammonius had with his Egyptian heritage. Nor can we determine his relation to the ideas later ascribed to his students.

A note is in order on the Alexandrian ground upon which the Plotinian system unfolds. The *Corpus Hermeticum* is a collection of short treatises, a fusion of Greek and Egyptian thought, written in Greek in Alexandria between the second and third century. These manuscripts were believed to be the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, the name given by the Classical Greeks to the Ibis-headed Egyptian god Thoth. The *Corpus Hermeticum* was central to a spiritual manner of thinking that flourished in Alexandria during the lifetime of Ammonius. These *Mysteries* were intended to affect *gnosis* in the initiate, awakening the soul to "realization", where identity is achieved between the individual and Absolute Reality. We move from Uraeus to Amon-Re to Ouranus, from Hermes to Aesculapius, a *mythos continuum* of extraordinary

beauty. The *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Aesculapius* introduces the initiate to the more esoteric aspects of Plotinian thinking.<sup>18</sup>

Among the pupils of Ammonius were Plotinus and Origen the Neoplatonist, often confused with Origen, the great Christian theologian, also a student of Ammonius. Origen the Neoplatonist rejected the Plotinian concept of the One and regarded the *Nous* as the highest principle. Longinus also was a student of Ammonius, considered by Plotinus a scholar but not a philosopher. Like Plotinus, in contrast to the convention of Plato, Longinus was the first to locate the eternal ideas at a level after the *Nous*. Here the Platonic forms reign, images of the Plotinian One, the Divine All-Unity. Longinus was Porphyry's teacher before he became a student of Plotinus.

As the last great expression of Greek philosophy, Neoplatonism borrowed from all preceding schools. The influence of Aristotle can be found in its philosophical method and logical propositions. Its aspiring to the Absolute Good of a spiritual realm is clearly a continuation of Pythagoras and Plato. Its derivation of all realities from a transcendent One is pure Parmenides.<sup>19</sup>

*The Platonic Parmenides is more exact; the distinction is made between the Primal One, a strictly Pure unity, and a secondary One which is a One-Many and a third which is a One-and-Many; thus he too is in accordance with our thesis of the Three Kinds. (V.1.viii)*

The Plotinian conception of a Divine Intellect active in the world is clearly derived from the dynamic pantheism of the Stoics.<sup>20</sup> Neoplatonism is the culmination of Greek metaphysical thought, not a mere eclecticism, but a true synthesis. Previous attempts to create a meaningful world had been eroded. A sceptical pessimism had rendered the world virtually meaningless. Further descent into scientific materialism advanced little on the seminal ideas originally advanced by Pythagoras. Theoretical judgements were no longer conducive to practical life. Notwithstanding, there remained positive elements found in the philosophy of Plato and the Stoics.

The idea of transcendence is the foundation of the Platonic tradition. Plato spoke of a transcendent reality, a realm of eternal forms, as the true and

ultimate constitution of things.<sup>21</sup> Any understanding derived through the empirical world alone has no lasting value. As it was for Pythagoras, so it is with Plato, the authentic aim of human existence is to become as near to God as humanly possible. With Aristotle we retain the idea that the divine is a transcendent form without substance or matter, perfect in itself. This highest form or monad is called the Good. It animates the world not causally, but by activating everything finite in its image.

For Plotinus, the Stoics are perhaps more important than either Plato or Aristotle. Stoic doctrine establishes the *Logos* as the divine power that is present in all existence. Heraclitus was the precursor who determined the *Logos* as the law that animates all reality. The *Logos* is the first law of the Nature-Principle, an activating relation that generates meaning into the manifold of our natural environment, bestowing Being on beings and things in the world. The Stoic *Logos* gives structure to the intuitive soul. It is the Rational-Principle that mediates upon its transcendental constitution, the Universal Soul. The difficulty is that the Stoics were rather pessimistic about living the way of *Logos*, most often opting to withdraw from the world. It is left to Plotinus to advance a more active participation with the world. Philosophy had been too long in the material domain of logical positivism. Plotinus returns philosophy to its true way, meditating on the *theos* of its mythological ground, through an all-embracing, rationally consistent dialectic, a spiritual elevation of the soul.<sup>22</sup>

## THE HISTORICAL PLOTINUS

Generally speaking, Neoplatonism denotes the teaching of Plotinus (204-270 C.E.), a Hellenized Coptic Egyptian born at Lykopolis in Upper Egypt.<sup>23</sup> When he was twenty-eight years old he discovered philosophy, after passing unsatisfied from teacher to teacher until he found in Alexandria the teacher he sought, the Egyptian Ammonius Saccus, the "God-Taught".<sup>24</sup>

After studying with Ammonius for some ten years Plotinus accompanied Emperor Gordianus III on his campaign against the Persians, quite practically to learn first-hand something of the teachings of the *Magi* and *Brahmans* first introduced by Ammonius in cosmopolitan Alexandria. He reached Mesopotamia, returned to Antioch, and then in 244 went to Rome. He taught there until about 268, retiring from public life to the country estate of a disciple in Campania.<sup>25</sup>

During the first ten years Plotinus was in Rome, he respected his master Ammonius and consigned none of his teachings to text. When he did commit to writing, he went out of his way to respect the tradition of the Egyptian *Mysteries* first introduced by Ammonius, and acknowledges that he is passing on a wisdom that until now had remained within the sanctuary of *gnosis*.

*This is the meaning hidden in the Mysteries, and in the Myths of the gods. This is the purport of that rule of our Mysteries: Nothing Divulged to the Uninitiate: the Supreme is not to be made a common story, the holy things may not be uncovered to the stranger. (V.1.vii; VI.9.xi)*

When Porphyry became his follower in 263, Plotinus had completed his first collection of twenty-one lectures. Two additional collections were written when Porphyry was in Sicily. The final nine treatises were written in the last two years of his life. The Plotinian *corpus* was collected after his death and given the name *Enneads*. This task was undertaken by Porphyry, who collected and arranged fifty-four treatises of the master into six *Enneads*, each containing nine *tractates* arranged in systematic order.<sup>26</sup> We note that Plotinus places his lecture *On Beauty* at the beginning of his original collection of twenty-one treatises.

Plotinus is generally known through his medieval commentators who tended to accommodate him to Christian apologetics. This secondary reading is unfortunate.<sup>27</sup> Stephen MacKenna tells us that we must know Plotinus first-hand if we are to understand his more spiritual meaning. Failing any previous knowledge of the main tenets, the individual *tractates* will be difficult.



A serious misapprehension may be caused, to take one instance among several, by incautiously reading into terms used by Plotinus meanings or suggestions commonly conveyed by those words in the language of modern philosophy or religion; on the other hand, there is in places almost a certainty of missing these same religious or philosophical implications or connotations where to the initiate the phrase of Plotinus conveys them intensely.<sup>28</sup>

For example, the notion of becoming wholly identified with the Divine Mind leads to attaining the highest accessible "person" of the godhead, Kronus, son of Ouranus, the unknowable One. Ascent to identity with the divine intellect is to recognize a transcendent wisdom already present within.

Essentially there are two perspectives in Plotinus: The existential or religious concern for the individual soul, developed in conjunction with his concern for a fading ancient *ethos*, and the transcendental constitution of metaphysics. It is evident that concern for the soul is his first priority. Plotinus seems to go out of his way to preserve the validity of our modern notion of alienation as the basis for his own integrative psychology. The claim that he does not offer a viable alternative to established tradition is wrong. Plotinus seeks to verify a fundamental affinity between the All-Unity of *theos* and human experience, and fulfils this intention through his meditation on art.

For Plotinus the *Nous* or Divine Mind is Ultimate Unity – Beauty, Truth and Good, the One Idea. The horizon of ultimate mystery is opened. The Plotinian assumption of a higher *Logos* proceeds from the necessary All-Unity of the One. What distinguishes Plotinus from Plato is the assumption of a realm prior to the eternal forms. Something higher must be sought, what Plotinus calls a *simplex*, a "monad" or "specific unity", identical with the Godhead and wholly transcendent.

*Untouched by multiplicity, it will be wholly self-sufficing, an absolute First, whereas any not-first demands its earlier, and any non-simplex needs the simplicities within itself as the very foundation of its complete existence.*

*Our One-First is not a body: a body is not simplex and, as a thing of process cannot be a First, the Source cannot be a thing of generation: only a principle outside of body, and utterly untouched by multiplicity, could be the First.*

*Any unity, then, later than the First must be no longer simplex; it can be no more than a unity in diversity. (V.4.i)*

Herein lies the one source of all thinking and being, all beauty and all activity, namely the many. The utter transcendence of the One taught by Plotinus is a more radical form of Platonism than that embraced by any of his predecessors.

The most difficult question of the Plotinian synthesis follows: How from the One, the many? This question arises when Plotinus must account for the "loveliness" or Primal Beauty that issues from the One, how becoming arises out of the unchanging, and plurality out of unity. In order to address this problem, Plotinus advances a theory of emanation, imaging itself on the generative principle of nature.

### **EMANATIONISM**

The concept of emanation is fundamental to the Plotinian scheme of things. The Primal Beauty that springs from the One is identical with its Source and Term, our ultimate Goal. It is Good.

*Since there is Source, all the created must spring from it and in accordance with it; and we are rightly told not to go seeking the causes impelling a Source to produce, especially when this is the perfectly sufficient Source and identical with the Term [Good]: a Source which is Source and Term must be All-Unity, complete in itself. This then is Beauty primally. (V.8.vii,viii)<sup>29</sup>*

Plotinian emanationism attempts to explain the origin and structure of reality by postulating a transcendent principle from which everything flows.

*There is in everything the Act of the Essence and the Act going out from the Essence: the first Act is the thing itself in its realized identity, the second Act is an inevitably following outgo from the first, an emanation distinct from the thing itself. (V.4.ii)*

The word "emanation" is from the Greek *aporroia*, *probolē* and *proodos*, or "procession". The Latin translation *emanatio*, *emanare*, means "to flow forth", or "overflowing". Metaphors are many: The bounty of nature, the unfolding from a seed, the sun, echoes of Amon-Re the One, and the divine light that "irradiates" from it.

*It must be a circumradiation – produced from the Supreme but from the Supreme Unaltering – and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance.*  
(V.1.vi)

Accordingly, creation is becoming and process, an operation of abundant overflowing, from the One and to the One. The entire *cosmos*, and all the gods and godheads, comes about as procession from the One. In turn these manifest or rather emanate further existences, with all being and beings combining and interacting through an extraordinary gathering of all that exists.<sup>30</sup>

There is some affinity of meaning between Plotinian emanationism and pantheism, except that the latter teaches the immanence of the cosmogonic First Principle. The term pantheism is from the Greek *pantheos*, "everything is God". The concept is distinguished from panentheism, where the multitude of beings and things are regarded as a "constituents of God", not identical with Him.<sup>31</sup>

The Plotinian schema is described as a hierarchy of realities vertically arranged from mortals to the gods, so to speak, from earth to sky. This method of ordering is meant only to assist our understanding, for these terms are the *glyphs* or ideograms of Plotinian dialectic, an iconography that should not be taken literally. They are logical philosophical propositions. Each higher realm generates the one below, and each stands as source or creator of that which proceeds from it. Each stage in this great chain of being has its own specific characteristic. Plotinian emanationism follows a "principle of plenitude".<sup>32</sup> What this means is that emanation from the One does not cease until everything that can possibly exist comes into being, always in the process of eternal becoming. Creation does not stop at the realm of the gods, but continues through all horizons of existence to the necessary imperfections of our material world.

In contrast to the monotheistic idea of a Deity who creates through a deliberate act of will, Plotinus images the activity of *theos* after the

spontaneous, irrational generative operation of Nature, not the laborious deliberations of a divine artisan.

*We are not to think that the Soul acts upon the object by conformity to any external judgement; there is no pause for willing or planning; any such procedure would not be an act of sheer Nature, but one of applied art.*

*The administration of the cosmos is to be thought of as a living unit. And in so far as the cosmos is a conducted thing, its administrator will follow not the way of the doctor but the way of Nature. (IV.3.x; 4.xi)*

Plotinus offers an image of a transcendent world, a kind of epiphany or manifestation of God. This emanationist cosmology has to be lived, it is not mere theoretical hypothesis. It is vision of the "actual", the divine forms arranged order upon order, not an abstract speculation. It *is* the contemplative reality.

There are two aspects of the Plotinian emanationist model. We may describe the first as a "procession" out of pure "formlessness" into the bounty of infinite possibility that issues from the One. It is impossible for beings to receive any meaningful form as long as their descent into multiplicity is without reference to their ultimate source. The idealist posits that they mirror the perfection of their origin. The second aspect of Plotinian emanationism is an eternal "return" to source.<sup>33</sup> Being itself contemplates the One, and so receives its ultimate form and meaning, the *Logos* of Universal Soul.

The theory of emanation advanced by Plotinus transcends the rhetoric of logical positivism. It responds to the picture language of *poiesis*, a term that signifies an act of "making" or "producing". *Poietic* understanding is epistemologically prior to both theoretical and practical knowledge. We are witness to Plotinus coming to terms with the end of metaphysics, the culmination of theoretical reasoning. He describes this intellectual achievement poetically, by way of a statement "more direct", a metaphor image even "more compact" than the propositions of discursive reasoning. (V.8.vi)

*It must unfold from some concentrated central principle as from a seed, and so advance to its term in the varied forms of sense. The Prior in its being will remain unalterably in the native seat; begotten to it by an ineffable faculty of its being, native to soul as it exists in the Supreme.*

*To this power we cannot impute any halt, any limit of jealous grudging; it must move forever outward until the universe, no part of which it can endure to see without some share in its being. All, thus, is produced by an inexhaustible power giving its gift to the universe, no part of which it can endure to see without some share in its being. (IV.8.vi)*

Plotinus follows the generative image provided by Lady Nature in affirming that all beings produce yet other beings. Again, the question remains: Why should the most perfect of all existents, Primal Beauty and Highest Power, remain absorbed in itself, so to speak, impotent to generation? This is, of course, an anthropomorphic dilemma rather than a metaphysical explanation. Plotinian emanationism is founded upon the view that the One shares in its abundance, and as highest principle does not contain the lower. The ineffable simply overflows benevolent and abundant perfection into existence. Plotinus gives us an image of this rather beautiful event:

*The One is all things and no one of them; the source of all things is not all things; all things are its possession. It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from it: in order that Being may be brought about, the source must be no Being but Being's generator, in what is to be thought of as the primal act of generation.*

*That station towards the one [the fact that something exists in the presence of the One] establishes Being; that vision directed upon the One establishes the Intellectual-Principle; standing towards the One to the end of vision. It is simultaneously Intellectual-Principle and Being; and, attaining resemblance in virtue of this vision, it repeats the act of the One in pouring forth a vast power. (V.2.i)*

The active vitality that springs from the Intellectual-Principle is Being itself, the Universal Soul, an infinite extension of parts that participates in a continuous whole through the laws that gives existence its various forms. The Plotinian image of an overflowing benevolence is pure *poiesis*. It nourishes the very ground upon which the Being of beings arise. Water is the "giver of life", its universal symbolic meaning. The image is powerful in its pure simplicity,

benevolence overflowing into goodness. The ancient Greeks looked upon water as a natural phenomenon, the material of a natural world. For Plotinus, the overflowing image provides us with a moral lesson, since the First Act is at once beautiful and good. Plotinus offers other metaphors such as the radiation of heat from fire and the fragrance of a flower, but it is the fullness of a benevolent overflowing that impacts our understanding.

## THE HYPOSTASES

The word *hypostasis* is from the Greek, and means "underlying state". It asserts an ultimate form, a predicative hypothesis or primordial reality that supports all else. In other words, our meditation on the meaning of the being of art engages ultimate ideas and forms. Plotinus describes the *hypostases* thus:

*This is the explanation of Plato's Triplicity, in the passage where he names as the Primals the Beings gathered about the King of All. These teachings are, therefore, no novelties; our doctrine here is the explanation of an earlier and can show the antiquity of these opinions on the testimony of Plato himself. (V.1.viii)*

*This combined Intellectual realm will be the Primal Intellect: we have only to examine how this reality, conjoint of Intellectual-Principle and its object, is to be understood. (V.5.i)*

We are introduced to the Plotinian categories, the universal forms with which all other objective ideas can be expressed.

*But if we seek the vision of that great Being within the Inner Sanctuary – self-gathered, tranquilly remote above all else – we begin by considering the eikōi stationed at the outer precincts. (V.1.vi)*

The Greek term *eikōn*, "holy image", portrays spiritual beauty, not sensible beauty. The exemplar archetypes are more than mythological "persons". They are the images of an understanding "more compact", an iconic vision that participates with an incarnate *Logos*. To fully understand the images presented by Plotinus we ourselves must become a picture of beauty, and perceive them with beautiful eyes.

*The clear eyed hold the vision within themselves, though for the most part, they have no idea that it is within but look towards it as to something beyond them and see it as an object of vision caught by a direction of the will.*

*All that one sees as a spectacle is still external; one must bring the vision within and see no longer in that mode of separation but as we know ourselves.*

*Similarly any one, unable to see himself, but possessed by that God, has but to bring that [divine-within] before his consciousness and at once sees an image of himself, himself lifted to a better beauty. (V.8.x,xi)*

The *eikōi* render visible an invisible realm, revealing a spiritual world that cannot be apprehended through our natural senses alone. These pictures are windows into the Platonic realm of ideal forms, for they reveal the sacred world of a divine reality. They signify the Holy Spirit as the lived form and existential shape of our human experience, transfigured beyond the sensible and natural.

Each Plotinian *hypostasis* is the universal *eidos* and requires its own transcendent sphere, for it is the archetypal form according to which all individual becoming is modelled. Plotinus develops the Platonic hypothesis of universal categories, the realm of ideal forms, to incorporate that which gives them being. The *hypostases* collectively constitute a rationally consistent example of an emanationist reality. Everything that exists participates with its Source, an infinite bestowal that goes through various stages of becoming and diminution in order to *be* in the world, a world equal to the All-Unity of creation. Each *hypostasis* constitutes a "particular continuity" in the "specific unity" of the divine spectrum. The *hypostases* are mirror images of *theos*. They speak collectively as the first thoughts, Beauty, Truth and Good. From within the mythological context of their constitution, they are the mythological "persons" or archetypes, Ouranus, Kronus and Zeus, exemplars according to which all beings and things are created.

The theory of emanation advanced by Plotinus describes the One as the mysterious sanctuary of the First Act, engendering itself to understanding as "pure creativity", the first principle of *poiesis*, an image of "making" or "production". Second within this hierarchy is the Intellectual-Principle or Divine

Mind. It contemplates the One and is nothing but the One, transcendent and superior to all other things. There follows the Universal Soul and its formative principle, the World-Soul. The World-Soul participates with its ultimate efficacy, the higher *Logos*; just as the Intellectual-Principle is the *Logos* activity of the One. The Intellectual-Principle is the act that gives meaning to the One. This relational feature, one *hypostasis* to the other, is the higher *Logos*, the formative principle from which each proceeds and is that which governs their development. The *Logos* does not indicate a separate *hypostasis* as such, it expresses the meaningful relationship between the eternal ideas and their source.

## THE ONE

The first *hypostasis* that Plotinus presents establishes the authority of the ancient myths. It is Ouranus, the unknowable One, the Ultimate Reality or First Principle, perfectly transcendent and eternally creative.

*All that is fully achieved engenders: therefore the eternally achieved engenders eternally an eternal being. (V.1.vi)*

Emanation is a becoming into individual existences, fragmentation of the original All-Unity. Each stage is a diminution into greater multiplicity or "particular discontinuity", for the One constitutes a negation of duality.

The One is "formless", "unmeasured", and "infinite". Plotinus is an early advocate of "negative theology", where language can speak only on what *theos* "is not", not on what "it is". For example, to deny that the One is motion does not mean that it is motionless. Both *stasis* and *flux* coexist in the Sanctuary of Mystery. Rather, the One "circumradiates" from within its "specific-unity", where the duality of motion and rest do not apply in the Supreme Unaltering.

*Everything moving has necessarily an object towards which it advances; but since the Supreme can have no such object, we may not ascribe motion to it: anything that comes into being after it can be produced only as a consequence of its unfailing self-intention. (V.1.vi)*



Due to its utter freedom from limitation, Plotinus describes this benevolent gift as Primal Beauty, the Ultimate Good of both "procession" and "aspiration".

*The offspring must seek and love the begetter; and especially so when begetter and begotten are alone in their sphere; when, in addition, the begetter is the highest good, the offspring [inevitably seeking its Good] is attached by a bond of sheer necessity, separated only in being distinct. (V.1.vi)*

*The One is the most perfect and creative of all existents. Multiplicity is an overflowing of the logical particulars of the simplex. Each occasion of emanation is an overflow into greater plenitude. Untouched by multiplicity, it is wholly self-sufficing, an absolute First, whereas any not-first demands its earlier, and any non-simplex needs the simplicities within itself as the very foundation of its composite existence. (V.4.i)*

*This can mean only that the First is neither remote from things nor directly within them; there is nothing containing it; it contains all. It is the Good to the Universe if only in this way. (V.5.x)*

Ultimately, little can be said about the ineffable, for the One that can be named is not the eternal One.<sup>34</sup>

*That awesome Prior, The Unity, is not a being, for so its unity would be vested in something else: strictly no name is apt to it, but since name it we must there is a certain rough fitness in designating it as unity with the understanding that it is not the unity of some other thing.*

*Thus it eludes our knowledge, so that the nearer approach to it is through its offspring, Being. (VI.9.v)*

The One is simply the Term or the Good, approachable only through the concepts goodness, benevolence, perfection, and pure creativity. Plotinus offers direction for our understanding:

*Think of the One as Mind or as God, you think too meanly; use all the resources of understanding to conceive this Unity and, again, it is more authentically one than God, even though you reach for God's unity beyond the unity the most perfect you can conceive. (VI.9.vi)*

## THE DIVINE MIND

The second hypostasis is the *Nous*. Its image is Kronus, the Divine Mind, son of Ouranus. Conscious of being an image of the One, contemplating the Divine All-Unity of existence, it is Actual Being.

*The greatest, later than the divine unity, must be the Divine Mind, and it must be the second of all existence, for it is that which sees The One on which alone it leans. The offspring of the prior to Divine Mind can be no other than that Mind itself and thus is the loftiest being in the universe, all else following upon it. (V.1.vi)*

*There is [therefore] intellectual-Principle as against Being, the intellectual agent as against the object of intellection; we consider the intellectual act and we have the Intellectual-Principle; we think of the object of that act and we have Being. (V.1.iv)*

The Divine Mind is pure creativity, but it is no longer an absolute unity. This is the realm of the Platonic ideas, the Divine Intelligibles, Beauty, Truth, and Good, the First Thoughts of God.

*A being of this quality, like the Intellectual-Principle, must be felt to be worthy of the all-pure: it could not derive from any other than from the first principle of all; as it comes into existence, all other beings must be simultaneously engendered – all the beauty of the Ideas, all the Gods of the Intellectual realm. And it still remains pregnant with this offspring; for it has, so to speak, drawn all within itself again, holding them lest they fall away towards Matter to be "brought up in the House of Rhea". (V.1.vii)*

The *mythopoietic* or iconic way of doing metaphysics describes Kronus as the "wisest", the transcendent Intellectual-Principle. As the myth proceeds, Zeus is the Universal Soul of the All-Unity of existence. Rhea or Lady Nature reveals the higher *Logos*, the principle of life that gives existential shape to the eternal forms that have issued from Kronus, the Divine Mind.

Divine Mind is pure identity. It is the image of the One. Its contemplation embraces the whole of the universe. In the realm of the Divine Intellect subject and object, thinker and thought are identical. Beauty, Truth and Goodness constitute the specific-unity of that order, every member an image of the One. The Divine Mind is the transcendent "unity-in-plurality". It is the pure intellect that gives ascent to the archetypes. The Intellectual-Principle is the realm of intuitive imagination, first property of the soul. Everyday discursive reasoning is transcended and attains to authentic understanding. Plotinus summarizes:

*There exists a principle which transcends Being; this is the One, whose nature we have sought to establish in so far as matters lend themselves to proof. Upon the One follows immediately the Principle which is at once Being and the Intellectual-Principle. Third comes the Principle, Soul. (V.1.x)*

## THE UNIVERSAL SOUL

From the Divine Mind proceeds the third *hypostasis*, Zeus, son of Kronus, the Universal Soul.<sup>35</sup> Zeus is the mirror image of the Intellectual-Principle that gives rise to his existence, the Being of beings, where intellection is "pure contemplation". The Universal Soul has no reflective thought. This is the function of the World-Soul, the activating link between the Universal Soul and the world of beings. Its Rational-Principle is the *Logos*, the formative operation that structures a meaningful world for human understanding.

*The Soul's nature and power will be brought out more clearly, more brilliantly, if we consider next how it envelopes the heavenly system and guides all to its purpose: for it has bestowed itself upon all that huge expanse so that every interval, small and great alike, all has been ensouled.*

*By the power of the soul the manifold and diverse heavenly system is a unit: through Soul this universe is a God. (V.1.iii)*

It is the World-Soul that constitutes the space and time continuum of human experience. Whereas the Divine Mind embraces the All-Being of the *noumena* in one timeless vision, the Universal Soul issues a manifold of *phenomena*, "unmoved and moved", one symbiotically participating with the other. The World-Soul constitutes the Divine Mind projected into time, the *a priori* constituent of our world. Although the World-Soul is eternally creative, it is no longer pure consciousness. It no longer embraces things in their specific unity as does the Universal Soul. The World-Soul is the *Logos* relation which functions as that which gives structure and meaning to the transcendental objects of the Universal Soul.

First is the Universal Soul, then the World-Soul. From the World-Soul proceeds the individual souls of beings in the world. The World-Soul is the first

among individual souls. It is the body of *cosmos*. Both the World-Soul and the individual human soul share in the embrace of the Universal Soul.

*The souls of men, seeing their images in the mirror of Dionysus as it were, have entered into that realm in a leap downward from the Supreme: yet even they are not cut off from their origin, from the divine Intellect; it is not that they have come bringing the Intellectual Principle down in their fall; it is that though they have descended even to earth, yet their higher part holds for ever above the heavens. (IV.3.xii)*

Meditations on the essential constituents of the human psyche in the first tractate of the *Fourth Ennead* declare:

*In the Intellectual Kosmos dwells Authentic Essence, with the Intellectual-Principle [Divine Mind] as the noblest of its content, but containing also souls, since every soul in this lower sphere has come thence: that is the world of unembodied spirit while to our world belong those that have entered body and undergone bodily division.*

*In that the secession is not of the soul entire; something of it holds its ground, that in it which recoils from separate existence.*

*The entity, therefore, described as "consisting of the undivided soul and of the soul divided among bodies," contains a soul which is at once above and below, attached to the Supreme and yet reaching down to this sphere, like a radius from a centre. (IV.1.i)*

Being an intuitive rather than a systematic thinker, Plotinus recognizes the soul as having two distinctive acts and divides the soul into the Reasoning-Soul, the intuitive achievement that leads to understanding, and the Unreasoning-Soul, the chthonic subtlety that animates the natural world.

*Thus our soul, too, is a divine thing, belonging to another order than sense; such is all that holds rank of soul, but [above the Life-Principle Nature] there is the soul perfected as containing Intellectual-Principle with its double phase, reasoning and giving the power to reason. (V.1.x)*

The Universal Soul is the infinite and eternal All-Unity of intelligible *cosmos*, containing not only all possible individual "soul-worlds" but also the unitary realm of Divine Mind.

*Two bodies [i.e., by hypothesis, the soul and the human body] are blended, each entire through the entirety of the other; where the one is, the other is also; each occupies an equal extension and each the whole extension. (IV.8.B.x)*

The summit of Universal Soul does not descend into this world. The Universal Soul is the eternal form or idea that remains in eternal contemplation of the Divine Mind. It is through the World-Soul that the higher *Logos* participates with the divine constitution of things, giving structural expression and existential meaning to the individual human soul.

### THE NATURE PRINCIPLE

Before entering upon the rather opaque subject of substance and the material world, the last emanation of the creative power of the Universal Soul, Plotinus directs our attention to the Nature-Principle, that which gives shape or form to a sensible natural world. When Plotinus permits Nature a reply to the question "why she brings forth her works" (III.8.iv), he allegorizes Nature. Again, the poetic genius of Plotinus speaks:

*And Nature, asked why it brings forth its works, might answer if [she] cared to listen and to speak:*

*"It would have been more becoming to put no question but to learn in silence just as I myself am silent and make no habit of talking. And what is your lesson?*

*This: that whatsoever comes into being is my vision, seen in my silence, the vision that belongs to my character who, sprung from vision, am vision-loving and create vision by their vision-seeing faculty within me.*

*The mathematicians from their vision draw their figures: but I draw nothing: I gaze and the figures of the material world take being as if they fell from my contemplation. As with Mother [Gaea] and the Beings that begot me so it is with me: they are born of a Contemplation and my birth is from them, not by their Act but by their Being; they are the loftier Reason-Principles, they contemplate themselves and I am born".*  
(III.8.iv)

In so presenting Lady Nature, Plotinus seems to posit yet another *hypostasis*, in the same way that the gods, Ouranus, Kronus, and Zeus announce the "persons" of a divine realm. Plotinus adds the image Rhea as Nature-Principle, daughter of Gaea the Earth, wife of Uranus. Lady Nature is a "necessary essence" to the all-embracing totality of Plotinian dialectic.

As was human being before its shaping by the universal Logos, everything is matter. It is the *physis* or "stuff" of the natural world. Matter is both necessary to Nature and Art.

*If on the contrary, Matter has come into being as a necessary sequence of the causes preceding it, that origin would similarly prevent it standing apart from the scheme as though it were out of reach of the principle to whose grace it owes its existence. (IV.8.vi)*

Not unlike the visual artist, the Nature-Principle gives shape and form to creation. It is Lady Nature that bestows upon the world "all that variety of colour and pattern". (III.8.ii) The Nature-Principle is a creative overflowing of the Universal Soul. Plotinus renders the image as follows:

*It should be clear that this indwelling efficacy which makes without hands, must exist in Nature, no less than in the craftsman.*

*To begin with, since in all its production it is stationary and intact, a Reason-Principle self indwelling, it is in its own nature a Contemplative act. All doing must be guided by an Idea, and will therefore be distinct from that Idea: the Reason-Principle then, as accompanying and guiding the work, will be distinct from the work, (III.8.ii,iii)*

The intelligible realm of Art springs from a transcendental intellectual act. It is the universal higher Logos, identified not with the generative essence of nature as such, but the Universal Soul operating in our world as its Nature-Principle.

## THE SENSIBLE WORLD

Matter is the last emanation of the Universal Soul. It is the "ultimate potential" or "possible", a difficult concept. Substance is near *me on*, "non-being", or *ouk on*, "non-existence", which is impossible in a world emanating from the bounty of Being.<sup>36</sup> Matter is the stuff through which the eternal forms find their natural element.

*From the beginning to end all is gripped by the Forms of the Intellectual Realm: Matter itself is held by the Ideas of the elements and to these Ideas are added other Ideas and others again, so that it is hard to work down to crude Matter beneath all that sheathing of Idea. Indeed since Matter itself is, in its degree, an Idea – the lowest – all this universe is Idea and there is nothing that is not Idea as the archetype was.*

*And all is made silently, since nothing had part in the making but Being and Idea – a further reason why creation went without toil. The Exemplar was the Idea of an All, and so an All must come into being. (V.8.vii)*

The sensible material world is an infinite remoteness from Pure Being. Because matter is indeterminate, Plotinus describes it as "inauthentic" and "evil" (II.4.xvi), unknowable by any reach of human reason, except by its negation. Insofar as evil has any ontological status whatsoever, the root of evil is in the material world. (II.9) Plotinus refuses to recognize the existence of Gnostic evil in the realm of eternal forms.

Matter remains as unaffected by the ideas as a mirror is unaffected by what it reflects. We note a rather uncomfortable parallelism between material substance and the One. Both are entirely indeterminate, albeit a very different kind. Both elude the ordinary concepts and precepts of human reason. We are required to recognize the existence of two fundamental regions of "material activity": one in the world of the sensible and the other in the realm of the ideal. The "matter of intellect" is not to be understood within the bounds of the everyday properties usually associated with the natural world. Plotinus justifies this curious enigma by assuming that every thing, including the matter that constitutes our sensible world, has its eternal model in the transcendental realm of the Divine Mind. Before we establish the existence of this archetype we are advised to examine its mode of being.

*Now if Matter must characteristically be undetermined, void of shape [form], while in that sphere of the Highest there can be nothing that lacks determination, nothing shapeless, there can be no matter there.*

*But, given Magnitude and the properties we know, what else can be necessary to the existence of body?*

*It is the corporeal, then, that demands magnitude: the Ideal Forms of body are Ideas installed in the Mass.*

*Now matter is a thing that is brought under order – like all that shares its nature by participation or by possessing the same principle – therefore, necessarily, Matter is The Undetermined and not merely the recipient of a nonessential quality of Indefiniteness entering as an attribute. (II.4.ii,xi,xii,xiv)*

Plotinus finds evidence of the One in the sensible world of human experience. The existence of any thing or being requires a totality or unity of parts and this specific unity can come from no other source than the One. In his effort to render the natural order as good and the expression of the One, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the material world is his most difficult problem.

*This All is one universally comprehensive living being, encircling all the living beings within it, and having a soul, one soul, which extends to all its members in the degree of participant membership held by each. (IV.4.xxxii)*

If we are to call the One Truth, Beauty or Goodness, we do not intend any formal affirmation of its quality. We can know the One only through the Good, that is, only in that it is the Goal or Term to which all beings aspire. The movement between symbol and sign always ascends to the desired of every individual soul.

*Beholding this Being – the Choragos of all Existence, the Self-Intent that ever gives forth and never takes – resting, rapt, in the vision and possession of so lofty a loveliness, growing to its likeness, what Beauty can the soul yet lack?*

*For This, the Beauty supreme, the absolute, and the primal, fashions its lovers to Beauty and makes them also worthy of love. (I.6.vii)*

Matter is the most opaque existence offered to human reason, the very opposite of the "divine light" of an intellectual *Nous* that informs intuitive understanding.<sup>37</sup> While Plotinus argues that the material world may be regarded as responsible for much evil and distortion, the sensuous nature of the universe is necessary to the good production of the One. It furnishes the "stuff" for the "imprinting" or shaping of the transcendental ideas as their manifest form – as it is now, so it has always been.

*If therefore matter has always existed, that existence is enough to ensure its participation in the being which, according to each receptivity, communicates the Supreme Good universally. (IV.8.vi)*

Without matter the realm of Art would remain insubstantial, without form and shape. Despite its difficult properties we think matter as absolutely necessary



to cosmogony, the necessary good of natural creation. We recognize a primordial becoming, of the Being of beings. Here operates the higher *Logos* as All-Unity, the ultimate meaning of all existences.

The *Logos* is the patterning "dynamic reason" of the Universal Soul, a cohesion in which the noun and pre-predicative concepts "form" and "to form" are thought together, coexistent and interchangeable. It is no evasion to separate the notion of "unity of parts" from such related concepts as "structure", "*gestalt*" and "process". Each historical era seeks to build its own tower of Babel, a central paradigm to ameliorate understanding. Form or structure seems central to our time, and is by way of intellectual recovery the unique quality of the Plotinian vision.

Necessary to the natural order of *cosmos*, the material reality of the universe is not inherently evil after all. This positioning is not so much to explain our material world as being in itself good, as it is to account for substance as necessary to the whole process of existence, being "necessarily good" only in an indirect sense. As we have noted, evil does not exist as such. An evil world holds only to possibility, an image of a particular kind of world "attitude", a world of materialism and "self-assertive reasoning".

### THE MATTER OF ART

When Plotinus meditates upon the material ground that composes a work of art, he acknowledges the positive quality of its substantive ground.

*The loveliness that is in the sense-realm is an index of the nobleness of the Intellectual sphere, displaying its power and its goodness alike: and all things are forever linked. (IV.8.vi)*

Art serves to make possible our way towards a more meaningful human existence. Together with the Universal Soul, Art is the necessary *poietic* or creative ingredient that which bestows meaning upon our every endeavour.

This formative process seems to presuppose *telos*, "final purpose", but not knowledge or thought. Everything is pervaded with rational power, the content of which permeates all being. Although the ideas are images of their eternal

archetypes, their relation with formless matter go lower still. Notwithstanding, Plotinus finds in the world of phenomena "traces" or *ichnoi* of the higher *noumenon*. Absolute Beauty is apprehensible even in the world of sensible matter. In spite of its being the last in the hierarchy of things, sensuous material is far from being evil or hateful. The spirit of Plato expressed in the close of the *Timaeus* dominates Plotinus:

And we should consider that God gave the sovereign part of the human soul to be the divinity of each one, being that part which, as we say, dwells at the top of the body, and inasmuch as we are a plant not of an earthly but heavenly growth, raises us from earth to our kindred who are in heaven. (*Timaeus*, 90)

Plotinus demonstrates an optimism not usual in those who turn away from the world. The virtues alone, such as goodness, temperance, courage and justice, cannot make the individual soul God-like.

*The solution is in understanding the virtues and what each has to give: thus the man will learn to work with this or that as every several need demands. And as he reaches to loftier principles and other standards these in turn will define his conduct.*

*For it is to the Gods, not to the Good, that our Likeness must look: to model ourselves upon good men is to produce an image: we have to fix our gaze above the image and attain likeness to the Supreme Exemplar. (I.2.vii)*

The ethical goal follows Pythagoras and Plato. Our task is to become as near to God as humanly possible, reaching towards an affinity with *theos*. Our aim is to ascend to the Highest Good, to the Godhead, where Primal Beauty reigns supreme. In the famous words of Socrates, the way of ascent "means becoming as like the divine so far as we can". (Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176)

The ultimate One remains ineffable, the Sanctuary of Mystery. Through the Nature-Principle, the eternal forms, Beauty, Truth, and the Good, images of the *hypostases* One, Divine Mind and Universal Soul, reach our understanding. These are the transcendental *eikōi* of an ancient learning, the deities of Plotinian dialectic, the *mythopoietic* ground that lends authority to his enterprise. The ancient gods are frequently mentioned throughout the Plotinian narrative. They are the reality of his thought. His worldview teaches that behind

the surface phenomena of art are three sacred principles, each more sublime than the preceding. They are *Ouranus*, the One, *Kronus*, Divine Mind, the Intellectual-Principle, and *Zeus*, the Universal Soul. All enter upon our *Lebenswelt* or "lived-world" as the eternal *Logos*. Contemplating the divine realities, we ourselves achieve to the source of Ultimate Meaning in quietude, completing the eternal cycle of emanation, procession and return.



## CHAPTER III: THE WAY

### RECOVERY OF *MYTHOS*

Where Plotinus names Ouranus, Kronus, and Zeus, he indicates the three *hypostases*, the eternal Godhead. By rendering the divine realm in this way he is saying that his entire system has already been thought in the *mythos* of a most ancient understanding. In other words, where we meet the gods without specification, we understand them according to their context, the One, the Divine Mind and the Universal Soul. The Divine Intelligibles, those qualities of the One that can be named, Beauty, Truth and Good, are rendered mythologically:

*That archetypal world is the true Golden Age, age of Kronus, who is the Intellectual-Principle as being the offspring or exuberance of God [Ouranus]. For here is contained all that is immortal: nothing here but is Divine Mind; all is God; this is the place of every soul. (V.1.iv)*

*The God fettered [as in the Kronus myth] to an unchanging identity leaves the ordering of this universe to his son, (to Zeus), for it could not be in his character to neglect his role within the divine sphere, and, as though sated with the Authentic Beauty, seek lordship too recent and too poor for his might. Ignoring this lower world, Kronus [Divine Mind, Intellectual Principle] claims for his own father [Ouranus, the Absolute, or One] with all the upward-tending between them: and he counts all that tends to the inferior, beginning from his son [Zeus, the All-Soul], as ranking beneath him.*

*Thus he [Kronus] holds a mid-position determined on the one side by the differentiation implied in the severance from the very highest, and, on the other, by that which keeps him apart from the link between himself and the lower: he [Kronus] stands between a greater father [Ouranus] and an inferior son [Zeus]. But since that father is too lofty to be thought under the name of Beauty, the second God [Kronus] remains primally beautiful.*

*Soul [Zeus] also has beauty, but is less beautiful than Intellect [Kronus] as being its image and therefore, though beautiful in nature, taking an increase of beauty by looking to that original [Ouranus]. Thus beauty is of the Divine and comes Thence only. (V.8.xiii)*

We are introduced to the iconographical "picture-language" Plotinus brings to dialectic when he makes metaphysical statements about the structure of the

universe. In this manner he increases upon both theoretical and practical knowledge to that of *poietic* understanding.

Porphyry has moved Plotinus to put this vision to writing, for he has recognized the larger significance of the Plotinian enterprise. His concern for the soul of his people motivates his endeavour to recollect the forgotten *ethos* of an eroding Hellenism. For Plotinus, the meaning of myth is primarily theological. Myth is *poiesis* further put to allegory and metaphor. The sublime "pictures" that *mythos* provides do not function discursively. They are the eternal *eikōi*, "holy images" that speak for themselves.<sup>38</sup>

Our failure to recognize this existential constituent is due to the fact that the language of the ancient myths has fallen into the rhetoric of "discursive reasoning". We have forgotten its transcendental content and its theological meaning. The difficulty is that our understanding of the ancient Greek myths is generally through the more technical language of anthropology, ontology and metaphysics. Plotinus advances upon a more primal *mythopoietic* way of thinking. The mythological realm has existed eternally in the There of its Ultimate Truth, unaffected by the more assertive reasoning of history. What truth affirms, it must also be. The *mythos* is now true, or else it was never true.

Plotinus grapples with a most difficult problem. The soul of his culture is in the process of being "forgotten" or lost to history. We too can feel his dismay, for history is not being good to Plotinus. There advances an accommodating and expanding Christian ideology that he describes as coupled to the "supreme conceits" of a "tribal god". (II.9) For Plotinus, the very ground of his culture is being undeniably shaken.

*What can it be that has brought the souls to forget the father, God [Ouranus], and though members of the Divine and entirely of that world, to ignore at once themselves and It? (V.1.i)*

A culture based on a traditional or indigenous mythology presupposes a harmony of its diverse cultural institutions. Any disruption to this correspondence poisons the very springs of human life, and creates maladjustment and suffering.<sup>39</sup> The consuming civilization cannot understand

this grief or defeat, because the very idea of *ethos* or "vocation" of a people loses its *raison d'être*, becoming for the advancing civilization primitive dogma and pagan superstition. The social ambition of a new ideology presents itself in total disregard for the individual character of the culture it seeks to enlighten, and cannot understand that to rob a people of their destiny is to take away their *Lebenswelt* or "lived world" in a way most profound. The gods of the older civilization become the manifest evil of the new world order.

What the vanity of this new way of doing things cannot understand is that a people live by their myths. They are no mere poetic invention. The content of myth is essentially its metaphysical image, a theological ontology that constitutes daily life in the culture of a people who live them through its institutions. Plotinus seeks to recover the *ethos* of an ancient tradition that he recognizes as being rendered meaningless. In so doing, he opens us to the dialectical ascent that recollects its enduring significance.

In Nietzschean terms, the gods of Hellenism are dead. No one listens any more to the unconditional saying of the Sanctuary of Mystery. Not quite, the ancient gods remain only hidden. For Plotinus, they are eternally present, manifest in the very imaging of his metaphysical art. The problem as Plotinus sees it, finds its source in the ways of a profane material world and the distorted, unauthentic *ethos* it advocates.

*The evil that has overtaken them has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of process, and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self ownership. (V.1.i)*

## THE METHOD

In order to transcend this world of process and dominion, Plotinus offers a rationally consistent practical solution.

*A double discipline must be applied if human beings in this pass are to be reclaimed, and brought back to their origins, lifted once more towards the Supreme and One and First.*

*[First], there is the method, which we amply exhibit elsewhere, declaring the dishonour of the objects which the Soul holds here in honour; The second teaches or recalls to the soul its race and worth; this later is the leading truth, and, clearly brought out, is the evidence of the other. (V.1.i)*

Our first consideration is for method, the dialectical Upward Way already brought to our meditation on the *hypostases*. The origin of dialectic may be appropriately attributed to Zeno, Socrates, and Plato, with the Sophists in a supporting role. The meaning of dialectic, the interpretation of nature, and the estimate of its importance alter widely in the course of Greek philosophy, depending on the epistemological position of the philosopher in question.<sup>40</sup> For Plato, dialectic embodies "highest knowledge", the coping-stone of its science. For Aristotle, dialectic proceeds from the "opinions of men" and is therefore less reliable than its demonstrations.

The term "dialectic" has become synonymous with logic in western philosophy. However, it retains its flavour as dialogue or "art of conversation". Plotinus follows the "dialogical" method of Plato, but something new is added. He utilizes a picture language to shape the philosophical statements he brings to theory of art, a dialectical methodology that is integral to his epistemology. Herein lies the problem of rendering the *Mysteries* inherited from Ammonius to the laws of discursiveness. The science of Plotinian dialectic advances on *mythopoietic* attainment of knowledge, to the highest order possible open to our understanding, the *eikōi* of an ancient learning.

Plotinus suggests that we prepare ourselves for the attainment of an authentic human existence by the exercise of dialectic. The seeker after true knowledge "must be put through a course in Dialectic and made an adept in the science". (I.3.iii) The method is rational consistency and recognizes a dynamic movement in thinking by way of rigorous distinction between qualitatively different ontological realms.

*It is the Method, or Discipline, that brings with it the power of pronouncing with Final Truth upon the nature and relation of things – what each is, how it differs from others, what common quality all have, to what Kind each belongs and in what rank each stands in its Kind and whether its being is Real Being, and how many beings there are, and how many non-Beings to be distinguished from Beings.*

*It is the precious part of philosophy. We must not think of it as the mere tool of the metaphysician: Dialectic does not consist of bare theories and rules: it deals with verities.*

*Existences are, as it were, Matter to it, or at least it proceeds methodically towards Existences, and possesses itself, at the one step, of the notions and of the realities it employs the Platonic division to the discernment of the Ideal Forms, of the Authentic Existence and of the First Kinds [or Categories of Being]: it establishes, in the light of intellection, the unity there is in all that issues from these Firsts, until it has traversed the entire Intellectual Realm: then, resolving the unity into the particulars once more, it returns to the point from which it starts. (I.3.iv,v)*

Plotinian dialectic is a movement or ascent towards Ultimate Meaning, and is at the same time an existential quest toward personal realization.

### **PREREQUISITE BEAUTY OF MIND**

Our meditations on the *hypostases* have prepared us for the first motivation of Plotinian concern, recovery of the soul. The preliminary stage of our personal achievement is to become God-like, to become beautiful as the Good is beautiful.

*Therefore we must ascend again towards the Good, the desired of every Soul. Anyone that has seen This, knows what I intend when I say that it is beautiful. Even the desire of it is to be desired as a Good. To attain it is for those that will take the upward path, who will set all their forces towards it, who will divest themselves of all that we have put on in our descent: so, to those that approach the Holy Celebrations of the Mysteries. (I.6.vi,vii)*

This moment of achievement opens human being to Primal Beauty, where the existential soul recollects itself to its Original Source. For Plotinus, this process of individuation leads to "self-surrender" and is the ultimate experience in human life.

*Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that soul is the author of all living things. That great soul must stand pictured before another soul, one not mean, a soul that has become worthy to look, emancipate from the lure, from all that binds its fellows in bewitchment, holding itself in quietude. (V.1.ii)*

Soul means the divine all-pervading Universal Soul of which each individual human soul is a part. Our own individual soul shares in its objectively constituted Ideal Archetype. We recognize a personal "valuing" or judgement of self that cannot be diminished. The soul intuitively itself to be divine as we



ourselves become closer to God. "It is the presence of soul that brings real worth". (V.1.ii)

*This, by which the gods are divine, must be the oldest God of them all: and our own soul is that same Ideal nature, so that to consider it, freed from all accrument, is to recognize in ourselves that same value which we have found soul to be.*

*The soul once seen to be thus precious, thus divine, you may hold the faith that by its possession you are already nearing God: at no great distance you must attain: there is not much between. (V.1.ii,iii)*

We may well wonder how this attainment to intellectual beauty is assimilated. We recall that the eternal forms Beauty, Truth and Good, are identical in virtue of the Universal Soul.

*As a manifold, then, this God, the Intellectual Principle, exists within the Soul here, the Soul which once for all stands linked a member of the divine. (V.1.v)*

Any intellection we undertake finds its source in the Divine Mind. The operations of reason refer to the divine intellect within, for it is the intuitive soul gives shape to the eternal ideas. The difficulty is that we remain rather complacent. Why disrupt the status quo, "for how can that seek change, in which all is well?" (V.1.iv). From the One to the One, the solution lies within.

*Its knowing is not by search but by possession, its blessedness inherent, not acquired [willed]; for all belongs to it eternally and it holds the authentic Eternity imitated by Time which, circling around the Soul, makes towards the new thing and passes by the old. (V.1.iv)*

The seeker of wisdom need not go too far to attain an Ideal Archetype of the Authentic Self once we have seen that our own soul is part of it. After we have discovered the basic hypostatic ontological realms, and gained an understanding of our own individual soul through the discipline of dialectic or "right reason", there is essentially no argument why the beauty of Nature and Art may not be instructive and enjoyable.

Herein lies the ultimate beauty of our assent, a *meta-noia* or "conversion of consciousness" is achieved. We attain to a new way of being in the world, where in authentic knowing subject and thinker, object and thought are

identical. (V.1.iv) We recollect the existential self to the *uniate* or "unitary way" of being human. Plotinus describes the individual thinking subject through our apprehension of the first categories, Beauty, Truth and the Good. First, the individual is thrown into a world that already exists. Second, we intuit a realm that is "other", not of this world. Third, an opening of the will establishes our affinity and identity with the theologically constituted universal object of our ultimate concern. We therefore enter that other "place", the prerequisite beauty of mind that Plotinus has asked us to achieve.

The whole process is not an easy one. It requires training and discipline. We must learn to cut away from self-assertion and detach ourselves from the multiple concerns of the everyday. Not that the world is inherently disagreeable or that beauty cannot be found in the everyday, the individual simply intuits something more perfect.

### **TO LIVE AT EASE**

A special kind of action and effort is required to achieve a level of consciousness beyond any act or "will to govern". This accomplishment is perhaps why our apprehension of the manifest forms of Beauty, Truth and Good in a work of art is such a stirring phenomenon for Plotinus. Art is a hint of the realm There, the First or Prior beyond the Being of beings, which the soul ultimately seeks. Our sense of the beautiful is a natural guide for distinguishing the higher and the lower orders of a totality that manifests itself as a Divine Unity.

We may very well ask how we can appropriate for ourselves this transcendental archetype, the Beauty of Art and Nature. We must recognize at once that it is by virtue of the intuitive soul that we grasp things through the Intellectual-Principle. However, this appropriation is more easily imagined than achieved. Beauty within cannot be willed into existence; one cannot will oneself to be beautiful. Plotinus tells us we must learn at the outset to "live at ease". This insight into the psychology of the authentic self is a fundamental Plotinian concept. To live at ease means to be There, in the Sanctuary of Mystery,

where "verity is mother", where all that *is* is not of reasoned or discursive process, but of dialectical awakening. (V.8.iv)

*For all [There] is transparent, nothing dark, nothing resistant; every being is lucid to every other, in breadth and depth; light runs through light. And each of them contains all within itself, and at the same time sees all in every other, so that everywhere there is all, and all is all and each all, and infinite the glory.*

*The Beauty is all beauty since it is not merely resident [as an attribute or addition] in some beautiful object. Each There walks upon no alien soil; its place is its essential self; and, as each moves, so to speak, towards what is above, it is attended by the very ground from which it starts; there is no distinguishing between Being and the Place. (V.8.iv)*

To be There is to be in the "open place" of the "essential self", the God-image within.<sup>41</sup> The problem is how the One can be known. In order to hold to the transcendental One, we must first become beautiful, because to know anything authentically is to become one with it. Our soul recollects to its original voice only in self-surrender. In other words, we must attempt to grasp the divine ground of beauty as an action and effort beyond any act of the will.

Authentic human life is a "wisdom unborrowed", not something added. To be "at ease" is the "primal wisdom". It is this verity that gives worth or "value" to human being, not as "inscription" or self-assertive reasoning, but as the ultimate truth of human existence.

*The true Wisdom, then [found to be identical with the Intellectual-Principle] is Real Being; and Real Being is Wisdom; it is wisdom that gives value to Real Being; and Being is Real in virtue of its origin in wisdom. But There not as inscription but as authentic existence. (V.8.v)*

We can characterize the Plotinian concept "to live at ease" as an "openness of the will", one that seizes on the ever-present origin or cosmogony that the One presents, the transcendental Giving Ground that is the very bestowal of Being to all beings and things. Plotinus counsels:

*To those who do not see entire, the immediate impression is alone taken into account. The clear-eyed hold the vision within themselves, though, for the most part, they have no idea that it is within but look [outwards] towards it as to something beyond them and see it as an object of vision caught by a direction of the will. (V.8.x)*

Rather than willing the beauty of art from within a *cogito* of inscriptive reasoning, as something already intended, we must remain open to its special message which is not of any *cogito* at all. Acts of the will are founded upon higher levels of faculty. The intentional objectivity of any intellectual act is always multiplied as are the manners in which these meaningful objects can be turned to. Categorical reasoning separately arises as real inclusiveness. This unique feature of inclusiveness is a necessary characteristic of our perception of something objectively immanent, and is the first principle of any theory of art founded upon such a perception.

### ***SECURUS SINE CURA***

What is required is a mode of willing that wills more strongly, transcending any objectifying self-assertion, more in accord with the will as the locus through which authentic human understanding is achieved. In this way, the will is not objectified. It remains open in attitude or "disposition", and does not set any limits to the objects of our intuition. This new kind of willing creates "secureness of mind", a secureness of metaphysical place. The human will now becomes "more resolute", and achieves to *securus sine cura*, "secureness without care", a willing that is unconditional.<sup>42</sup> In having opened our resolve toward an unwarranted manner of thinking, Plotinus implies a distinctive manner of consciousness conversion.

Creative endeavour means to draw upon the ultimate source of creativity. It is from within the "open ground" of the Sanctuary of Mystery, where Ouranus reigns, that the question of the meaning of the being of art arises. The question of beauty in art is turned towards the individual as the "objectivity of objects", and remains one with the intuitive intellect, first property of the soul. In contradistinction to the absolutist stance some may perceive in Plotinus, we detect a natural existential sphere that is indeed our most human feature. Beauty of mind is an inner recalling of the transcendental objects that lay within. Plotinian theory of art takes care to open itself to the more sanctified

existents that impact upon the stream of concrete references that the work of art imitates.

This achievement of conversion in disposition from the natural everyday to a transcendent realm is not so easily assimilated. The work of art is a concrete manifold upon which the Universal Soul *glyphs* its Primal Beauty. It is the beautiful soul that identifies with the formative activity of Art. We must remember that an authentic perception of the beautiful is neither a product of ordinary perception nor an act of pure reflection. It combines the detachment of the latter with the immediacy of the former.

Art like Lady Nature constitutes a realm of its own, but this vision is never detached from the sensible world of everyday existence. The very presence of art makes visible the world in which it appears. The experience that art provides is a knowing of a special kind. The individual soul experiences an affinity with both the subject and object of its intention, rather than a perception of something directed by the will as being "out there". Art is an event that establishes the Individual Archetype as distinct from any reflective thought. Our intuitive ability to judge something beautiful is the greatest form of a consciousness endowed with meaning.

The image provided by the work of art is the product of a mutual infusion of impression and expression and is achieved in its most pronounced sense when a condition of *harmonia* is established between the objective and subjective reference. In a word, only from a soul that experiences beautifully is art born. Only out of an invisible inner vision grows the eternally visible. In order to approach the constitutive nature of the work of art it is best to reflect on the experience that it presents to us and its consequence for meaning. Art may best be understood as the final significance of individual human existence, its openness to the mysterious power of *alētheia*, Ultimate Truth. Plotinus establishes the work of art as the objective context in which the act of judgement is originally constituted. Art is that inclusive concept of objective forms in which qualitative relations are expressed. We have been furnished

with a way toward that which makes visible the invisible and gives beauty to the beautiful. For this reason, Plotinus places his lecture *On Beauty* at the beginning:

*Beauty, this Beauty which is also The Good, must be posed as The First deriving from the First is the Intellectual-Principle which is pre-eminently the manifestation of Beauty, (I.6.vi)*

It is only through his meditations on the beautiful in art that Plotinus is able to constitute his dialectical ascent towards ultimate wisdom or *gnosis*, affinity with an infinite *theos*.

Plotinus questions whether human life can have meaning in a world shaped by material causes. Proper discipline of the mind involves a merging of all abstract and conceptual ideas, of absolute and relative, necessary and contingent, subjective and objective, eternal and temporal, potential and actual, sacred and profane, ideal and sensible. "What art is there, what method, what discipline to bring us there where we must go?" (I.3.i) There are two basic approaches to the pathway of authentic human existence:

*The first degree is a turning away from the everyday lower life; the second – held by those who have already made their way to the sphere of the Intelligibles, have set as it were a footprint there but must still advance within the realm – lasts until they reach the extreme hold of the place, the Term attained when the topmost peak of the Intellectual realm is won. (I.3.i).*

This "turning" or conversion of attitude returns human experience to the divine ground from which it has fallen, for everything is a "sign for something else". If we approach the experiences of Art by separating them from the *eikoi* or "holy images" of the Godhead it provides, we remain outside the embrace of the divine All-Unity. Plotinus is quite clear, we are meant to hold constant to the image of divine being, a sublime existent that penetrates into our understanding as that "place" where the artificer is that which is seen. (V.8.xi)

## **BEAUTY WAITS FOR ART**

The unified way of Plotinian thinking demands concurrent activity of thought, will, feeling, and intuition, which in authentic human life are never sundered.

We must strive to retrieve a way of thinking that does not distinguish either a subjective or objective reference, and dispense with the appearance of dualism. By proper discipline of these faculties towards the Transcendent Function of their specific unity, we become effectively a free participant with the divine nature of the universe.

We paraphrase Plotinus in recognizing the dialectic we advance upon. There is Intellectual-Principle and the Being of Primal Beauty, the intellectual subject and the transcendent object of our intention. When we refer to the creative act of cosmogony we have the Intellectual-Principle, our objective reference. When we think the object of that act, we have the Being of Art. (V.1.iv)

In order to ascend to Primal Beauty, we must wait for Art to make immanent its eternal possession. Theory of art grounds our discussion, not philosophy of the beautiful. We now approach towards the Prior and Source of the ideas that give rise to aesthetic judgement. The beauty we perceive in art images the Divine All-Unity. By its very nature, beauty is present where diversity has become an existential fact, which is why the experience derived from Art is unchanging.

*Let us, then, go back to the source, and indicate at once the Principle that bestows beauty to material things. Undoubtedly this Principle exists; it is something that is perceived at first glance, something which the soul names as from an ancient knowledge and, recognizing, welcomes it, enters into unison with it. (I.6.ii)*

The soul "thrills with an immediate delight", appropriating "other" to "own", constituting an intuitive understanding of the total order of its infinite wisdom. It is the image of beauty that the work of art manifests which bestows light to the parts that constitute its intelligible whole.

*This, then, is how the material [work of art] becomes beautiful – by communicating in the thought that flows from the Divine. (I.6.ii)*

Upon perceiving the beautiful in a work of art, our "first glance" provides us with a glimpse of the universal Logos, the happening event of an immanent "other" in which the "self" intuitively finds trace of kinship already within.

## AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT

Pursuant to our introduction to the objective elements of *kalon* or beauty as "harmony of mind", our meditations on art lead naturally to its subjective reference or "soul image", the "archetype of the individual self". Judgement refers to an act of the will. We must advance further, for we have but effectively come to terms with the subjective experiences that art initiates. We now proceed with an eye toward its objective intuition. Our experience of the beautiful indeed consigns to a subjective reference that is relative to individual taste. The problem of objective and subjective percepts also bears on the Divine All-Unity in which Art participates. The degree to which these notions can be considered independently is difficult to assess, for they are the intelligible attributes and qualities that ground the totality that comes to us for consideration and appraisal. The context of the one requires the other to participate with its ultimate meaning.

Kant assists our understanding on these matters by referring to the meaningful features or *Logos* structures of the "first Categories". To say that Beauty, Truth and the Good is the Supreme All-Unity and One and First is a philosophical statement about the *hypostases*, a proposition that finds its ideal form in the transcendent operations of "aesthetic judgement". The Being of Art therefore precludes upon our experience of beauty, for our apprehension of beautiful things logically intends the objective reference that forms the very basis our intention in the first place.

Aesthetic experience is unique in that its object is conceptualized as universal. To say that aesthetic judgement remains subjective and intends no objective reference is to deny the necessity of its ultimate good.<sup>43</sup> Plotinus believes that it is our intellect or reason that invests the world with structure and meaning. His meditations on art argue that it is through an *a priori* aesthetic judgement that we are able to experience its presentation and understand those experiences as part of an ordered whole. Because our judgements on the work of art exhibit precisely those features that allow us to



explore the principles of judgement as such, Plotinus uses his meditations on art as a way of entering into the question of judgement in general. The problem of judgement is fundamental because it establishes the meaningful connection between the two intentions of his vision, the "theoretical" or theology of art and the "practical" or psychology of the soul. His theoretical inquiry has as its topic the cognition of a metaphysical realm in a sensible world. His practical concern has as its topic the possibility of an ethical action or way of being in that world.

Plotinus suggests that a transcendent judgement principle unifies the whole of his dialectical method, at once the "image" and "word" of its saying. This is the link that discovers the unity among the objects and propositions of his philosophical endeavour. There are two aspects to the Plotinian answer to the question of how aesthetic judgements arise. Our faculty or ability to judge what is and what is not beautiful consists of a more fundamental mental operation. We recall that the archetypal forms, Beauty, Truth, and the Good, are always active and advance into the world through the intuitive soul. In so saying, Plotinus argues that judgement itself has its own operative principle, one that "governs" it. This element he calls its "purpose principle", for it asserts the epistemological aspect or *telos* of all things with respect to the ultimate meaning of our judgement in the first place. It also assumes that everything we experience is rendered through the powers of the synthetic intellect. Normally we are not aware that this complex set of mental operations are being made. In the case of art we do notice. Art has no concept of a purpose available outside the realm of its Ultimate Truth.

Plotinus describes two "kinds" of beauty. There is its eternal form, free and pure, presuming no concept of what the object of judgement could possibly be. Through the concept Primal Beauty we establish the beauty of Art as an "answering perfection" or mirror image of the object being judged. The operations of subjective beauty therefore presuppose a principle that constitutes the object of judgement, and with that reference an answering perfection of the beautiful object within.

Beauty is the first among the Divine Intelligibles, an eternal totality that predicates the whole of our sensible world. It is a self-sustaining archetype or form. When we perceive something to be beautiful, it is generally judged beautiful through a particular concept of beauty and must be regarded as that which gives a certain articulation to what is intended. Beauty now addresses the ultimate meaning of its being, namely the Primal Beauty particular to its existence. We establish our judgement of a work of art by proclaiming it to be beautiful. In so doing, we recognize that our judgement is grounded upon an objective reference that is itself an object of transcendental constitution.

Plotinus presents an articulation of infinite Beauty as Intellectual-Principle, judgement and its object. This reasoning seems to permit a logical subordination of Beauty to the ends of Goodness or virtue, but the Absolute neither gains by Beauty nor Beauty by its Ultimate Truth. This stance Plotinus must maintain if he is to prevent his theory of art from descending into aesthetics of the sensible, where the concept "perfection" is treated as "criterion" of the beautiful. When Plotinus offers a positive articulation of art and judgement he does so by beginning with the beautiful we perceive in a work of art, continuing our advance towards a theory of creativity in a way that is meant to insure against any conceptual predetermination of art from being established.

### **META-NOIA**

The process that leads from the Sanctuary of Mystery to the creation of a beautiful work of art also leads upward. It is a becoming that sets itself in contrast to the idea of substance. The human soul, by looking to itself and discovering its higher *Logos* through the "primal difference" it intuitively takes hold of the basic distinction which leads it away from the world of the everyday.

*Thus the Primals [the first "Categories"] are seen to be: Intellectual Principle; Existence; Difference; Identity. Such difference there must be if there is to be any intellection: but similarly there must also be identity [since, in perfect knowing, subject and object are identical]. (V.1.iv)*

Perceiving the "gradations of correspondence" represented in the various hypostatic realms, the human soul rises to the Divine Mind and then to the Primal Beauty of the One, beyond all intellectual reasoning and distinction.

Having intuited this hermeneutical image of the *cosmos*, the sacred *eikōi* of the Godhead, each sphere resolute by its relation to the One, our goal is to ascend through dialectical science to the highest possible knowledge of *gnosis*. The ascent of the soul means that we become the very object of our own contemplation. Our soul ceases to participate with an unauthentic fragmented world and becomes what it turns to, the truth of its immanent presentation. The soul tends not only to become "more true" in its quest, it also recollects to its cosmogonic source.

Our meditation on the meaning of art has a fundamental role in Plotinian *meta-noia* or conversion of consciousness, for the apprehension of beauty that draws the human soul upward reminds it of its authentic self and of the higher existence open to it. Those of us who attain to intellectual beauty as "harmony of mind" and grasp the *theos* image so presented will only then come to know the ultimate meaning that art constitutes.

In order that we may begin, we must first understand that Primal Beauty presents itself to our purview in virtue of the work of art. It is both the producer and perceiver of the beautiful that introduces the eternal idea or transcendental form that is its manifest identity. We are quick to recognize that the transcendent idea is not present in the work of art as such, and that the realm of eternal creativity abides in a far higher place than the sensible region of the world. The question now arises: How can we make visible a Divine Intellect that *is* the Primal Beauty of an intelligible *cosmos* and reveal it to human reason? Plotinus takes us directly to the realm of art.

*Art, then, creating in the image of its own nature and content, and working by the Idea or Reason-Principle of the beautiful object it is to produce, must itself be beautiful in a far higher and purer degree since it is the seat and source of that beauty, indwelling in the art, which must naturally be more complete than the comeliness of the external. (V.8.i)*

Creating an image of its own nature and content, art mysteriously "happens" by way of an eternal *gestalt*, perceptual content as a series of configurations or totalities, rather than a series of particular elements. The work of art is the vehicle through which an image of eternal creativity occurs and provides a concrete dimension through which *theos* becomes immanent.

*No doubt the wisdom of the artist may be the guide of the work; it is sufficient explanation of the wisdom exhibited in the arts; but the artist himself goes back, after all, to that wisdom in Nature which is embodied in himself; and this is not a wisdom built up of theorems but one totality, not a wisdom consisting of manifold detail co-ordinated into a unity but rather a unity working out into detail. (V.8.v)*

Beauty is "communicated", imparted to the work of art from within the structures that gives it being. (I.6.ii) Art is "impressed" upon the matter of our sensible world. However, the form transmitted is not the eternal form that gives shape to its meaning. If material extension was the ground of the beautiful then the One could not be beautiful. The One is without extension, containing all existence within the All-Unity of its presenting. As long as the object of art remains outside the perceiver and producer we can know nothing about it. The beauty of art affects us only as lived or by entry.

*In this way: the intellectual object is self-gathered [self compact] and is not deficient as the seeing and knowing principle must be – deficient, I mean as needing an object.*

*It is therefore no unconscious thing: all its content and accompaniment are its possession; it is self-distinguishing throughout; it is the seat of life as of all things; it is, itself, that self-intellection which takes place in eternal repose, that is to say, in a mode other than that of the Intellectual Principle. (V.4.ii)*

When something comes into being as an image that refers only to itself, "that entity must be the Source of that new thing". Both the artificer and his creation are the sensible objects of an act that takes intellection as its source, a "reproduction and image of that". (V.4.ii) The beauty we are pursuing is something different. Art is not found in any sensible imitation. Art is an act of the imagination, the intuitive soul, and "it is precisely there that the greater

beauty lies". (V.8.ii) Accordingly, there is the Nature-Principle which makes the divine concrete, for it is the *Logos* that generates the image we call art. It makes manifest the transcendental unity that gives shape to the natural world. Beauty found in nature is of greater beauty in the Universal-Soul, which in turn is the source of the unity of both Art and Nature. It is, therefore, not too much to suggest that Art like Nature is virtually complete and self-generating.

*Thus there is in the Nature-Principle itself an Ideal archetype of the beauty that is found in material forms and, of that archetype again, the still more beautiful archetype in Soul, source of that in Nature.*

*All that comes to be, work of nature or of techne some wisdom has made: everywhere a wisdom presides at a making. (V.8.iii,v)*

Hellenistic thinking on beauty provided many insights to the field of aesthetics. However, these ideas were concerned with the details of a scientifically derived materialism rather than with theory of art as such. Plotinus demonstrates a new way of doing aesthetics. It is new because it couples its metaphysical foundation to its empirical demonstration.

Plotinus took up the most crucial problems of traditional aesthetics, fundamental issues not raised since ancient times. In so doing, he expounded a rationally uniform theory of art. Art occupied an important place in the Plotinian scheme of things. He devoted much thought to sensuous beauty, conceiving the beauty of shapes and colours as reflection of a more perfect existence open to our view. (II.8.i) We now turn to the realm of art, its magnitudes. In the next chapter, we will follow Plotinus as he enters the concrete world of art and discover the intelligible beauty of ideas, *cosmos*, self, nature, world, meaning and God.



## CHAPTER IV: THEORY OF ART

### PARTING OF WAYS

It is only through sustained effort that we are able to achieve the There of the One, a vision of infinite wisdom. Only through preordained exercises in dialectic and "reflective meditation" on the *hypostases* do we attain to the prerequisite *meta-noia* that confirms our affinity with the divine. We must not lose sight of this most important feature of Plotinian *gnosis* or "awakening". It is only through a recollected beautiful soul that we are able to approach Ultimate Meaning, the sanctuary of eternal creativity that bestows beauty on all things beautiful.

Our ability to apprehend a transcendently constituted beautiful form in a profane world is indeed an event of extraordinary proportion, for it proceeds directly from a sacred realm. Seen in this light, the work of art is a very special window into the "more real". We find that we are in the realm of the holy *eikōi*, an iconic sphere that speaks more directly to human understanding, a place that discovers its ground in an act of the imagination. This is the creative realm of Zeus, the *Logos* power that gives creation its shape. We begin with the images that the realm of art provides.

*Admiring the world of sense as we look out upon its vastness and beauty and the order of its eternal march, thinking of the gods within it, seen and hidden, and the celestial spirits, let us mount to its archetype, to the yet more authentic sphere. Let us go to the images. (V.1.iv,vi)*

Beauty is for Plotinus the First Quality, the very image of the ineffable Source that bestows intelligible things into the universe. Overflowing generation into Primal Beauty is the First Act, an activity that identifies and sustains itself as infinite and creative existence. The beauty that we perceive in a work of art may be seen as, and I now use the term cautiously, a *mimesis* of the transcendent form that establishes its being, the Primal Beauty of the One.<sup>44</sup>

Plotinus advances on the accepted interpretation of *mimesis* as imitation. Art does not simply imitate or copy sensible things, either natural or crafted. Art is a mirror of the totality that gives ultimate meaning to its existence. The example Plotinus offers is that of the sculptor and architect, artificers of images of the gods and of the holy places in which they dwell.

*I think, therefore, that those ancient sages, who sought by the erection of shrines and statues, showed insight into the nature of the All; they perceived that, though this soul is everywhere tractable, its presence will be secured all the more readily when an appropriate receptacle is elaborated, a place especially capable of receiving some portion or phase of it, and serving like a mirror to catch an image of it.*

*It belongs to the nature of the All to make its entire content reproduce, most felicitously, the Reason-Principle in which it participates; every particular thing is the image within matter of a Reason-Principle which itself images a pre-material Reason-Principle: thus every particular entity is linked to that Divine Being in whose likeness it is made, the divine principle which the soul contemplated and contained in the act of each creation. (IV.3.xi)*

The image Plotinus creates is quite beautiful. The temple metaphor serves well his descriptive psychology of the soul. The image is turned inward, like a wheel within a wheel, toward the inner most reaches of the soul, for it is the existential soul that houses the gods now active in the world.

Once again, Plotinus parts ways with tradition. For Plato the work of art is meant to be a faithful representation of a sensible object. The problem for Plotinus is that the work of art proposed by Plato continues to add to our dilemma, for we are seeking a way to make visible the invisible. From within the Platonic configuration, the *telos* or purpose of the work of art remains an imitation of an imitation. In other words, art simply imitates the imitating objects depicted. The *mimesis* or "imitative skill" undertaken by the visual artist is underwritten by "canons of representation". Plotinus restores the term *mimesis* to its original meaning as "correspondence" and "identity". In this way, an intellectual affinity with the eternal forms, Beauty, Truth and Good, is recovered. Art presents itself through the sacred forms of ultimate meaning and signifies to human reason its place in the divine order of things.

Art is the eternal act of Ouranus. The Being of Art is the first thought of Kronus, the Divine Mind. Art is a mysterious object brought into our world by his son Zeus, the Universal-Soul. The All-Unity is always present and is the There or place where humankind finds its ultimate meaning and purpose. Every human being must recollect the divinity within and become beautiful as the divine is beautiful if we are to discover the full potential of the world. The artist that strives towards this true correspondence participates with the divine "dance-play" which he seeks to give form. The way of art is clear. Plotinus speaks directly to the artificer:

*When you know that you have become this perfect work, when you are self-gathered in the purity of your being, nothing now remaining that can shatter that inner unity, nothing from without clinging to the authentic man, when you find yourself wholly true to your essential nature.*

*This is the only eye that sees the mighty Beauty. To any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen, and having some likeness to it. Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike, and never can the soul have vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful.*

*Therefore, first let each become godlike who cares to see God and Beauty.*  
(I.6.ix)

Plotinus adds:

*And it is just to say that in the Soul's becoming a good and beautiful thing is its becoming like to God, for from the Divine comes all the Beauty and all the Good in beings.* (I.6.vi)

He does not deny that there is a connectedness between a work of art and the sensible object it imitates. However, the authentic motivation of artistic production lies deeper. Art is more than imitation of nature. Simply put, Plato makes the mistake of conceiving the artist as imitating the appearance of a "particular representation", where the work of art submits to the substantive aspect that imitation of an imitation encircles. Aristotle attempted to correct this problem by conceiving the artist as imitating the universal through its attributes, and tells us that "art is not inferior because it is imitative". (*Poetics*, 1447)



The difficulty remains, *techne* or the skilled manipulation of physical matter exemplified artistic creation. This aspect of the sensible over the ideal had for centuries been the central feature of traditional thinking on art and beauty inherited by Plotinus. Nevertheless, he retains a positive attitude with respect to the work of art.

*Still the arts are not to be slighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for, to begin with, these natural objects are themselves imitations; then, we must recognize that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Ideas from which Nature itself derives, and, furthermore, that much of their work is all their own; they are holders of beauty and add where nature is lacking. (V.8.i)*

Established tenets on theory of art held "proportion", and "measure" as being consistent with *kalon*, beauty as "that which pleases", and the "harmony of mind" inherent in its production. Plotinus respects the classical notion of *kalon* as *harmonia*, although *mimesis* advances somewhat changed. Imitation now means the *techne* or skill of a beautiful producing intellect, not the skill of the artisan manipulating pleasurable or satisfying effects on the sensible.

*At this point in our survey we have before us the over-world and all that follows upon it. That suite [the lower and material world] we take to be the very last effect that has penetrated to its farthest reach. It is brought under the scheme of reason by efficacy of soul whose entire extension latently holds this rationalizing power. (IV.3.x)*

Art does not conform to any external judgement or "pause for willing", for this act would not be a spontaneous act of "sheer nature", but one of "applied art". (IV.3.x) The same principles that holds *mimesis* to be imitation of concrete things were also present in the ancient concept of *symmetria*, where symmetry defines beauty as "agreement of parts". Symmetry expresses the conviction that beauty depends on relation and mathematical proportion. This rather conventional definition of art as "composite of symmetry" is for Plotinus far too narrow, and for that matter, fundamentally incorrect. From within this context of revisiting the traditional concepts of creativity, the more innovative features of his theory of art arise.

Plotinus discredits the *symmetria* definition for several reasons. He argues that if beauty depended on symmetry, it would appear only in "complex" objects and would not be present in, for example, the more "singular" aspects of colour, line and shape. Moreover, the concept of *symmetria* may be applied to material things but surely not to spiritual forms, such as intellect, truth and the virtue of goodness. For Plotinus, the traditional definition of beauty as symmetry can at best only apply to some beautiful objects but not all.

*Consider that some things, material shapes for instance, are gracious not by anything inherent but by something communicated, while others are lovely of themselves, as, for example, Virtue.*

*The same bodies appear sometimes beautiful, sometimes not; so that there is a good deal between being body and being beautiful. What, then, is this something that shows itself in certain material forms? This is the natural beginning of our inquiry. (I.6.i)*

Tradition has established that "symmetry of parts" constitutes the beauty we perceive in the work of art, a whole essentially symmetrical, effectively patterned in its parts. This means that only compounds can manifest the one idea that motivates our discussion. For example, the "symmetry of parts" hypothesis denies the primary colours their pure being. We are also reminded that presentations of abstract thought also do not hold to this theory of symmetrical assembly.

Plotinus skilfully overturns the basic tenets of ancient aesthetics, where beauty depends on *symmetria*, on relation of parts and good proportion. These concepts are for Plotinus only "reasoned propositions" and not the essence of its demonstration. The source of beauty is not symmetry, but that which "reveals" itself in symmetry, that which "illuminates" symmetry. The beauty of some objects may indeed depend on symmetry for their beauty, but these are merely sensible expressions of an ideal form. The essence of beauty cannot be symmetry. Beauty is that which reveals itself and lights the good proportions of its enduring quality. Art is the mirror image of the One or Supreme and exists as the ultimate All-Unity of the First. "Deprived of unity, a thing ceases to

be what it is called. Beauty appears when it is controlled by this principle, unity". (VI.9.i)

*Even here we have to recognize that beauty is that which irradiates symmetry rather than symmetry itself and is that which truly calls out our love. (VI.7.xxii)*

When Plotinus reflects on the material pigments used by the painter, he tells us that it is not possible for them to remain in the darkness, void of the divine light that illuminates the interior of their potential.

*The beauty of colour is also the outcome of a unification: it derives from shape, from the conquest of darkness inherent in Matter by the pouring of light, the unembodied, which is the Rational-Principle and an Ideal-Form. (I.6.iii)*

The beauty of art consists in its unity and as we have learned, there is no unity in matter as such. Skilful arrangement of the material substances that make up a work of art cannot be the source of beauty.

The Plotinian thesis that beauty is transcendentally constituted replaces the older tenet that its source lies in the symmetry of its sensible parts. The beauty we perceive in art is not its substantive demonstration. It is the Primal Unity of its internal expression. We are thus left to wonder at the effectual power this achievement makes possible. Plotinus provides us with objectively secured paradigms for everyday human conduct. Herein lies the *ethos* of its ultimate meaning, that to which our dialectical achievement has ascended.

*The beauty in things of a lower order comes by operation of the shaping Soul which is also the author of the beauty found in the world of sense. For the Soul, a divine thing, a fragment as it were of the Primal Beauty, makes beautiful to the fullness of their capacity all things whatsoever that it grasps and moulds. (I.6.v)*

Analysis of the sensuous establishes that it is not of substance alone, but includes elements of the spiritual sphere, for "the beauty inherent in body is similarly bodiless". (VI.3.xvi)

*But even there we are not to remain always, in that beauty of the multiple; we must make haste even higher. Everything There is a single Idea in an individual impression and, informed by The Good, possesses the universal good transcendent over all.*

*Each possessing that Being above, possesses also the total Living-Form in virtue of that transcendental life, possesses, no doubt, much else as well. (VI.7.xvi)*

Human being becomes the "lived form" of sanctified existence. Plotinus still questions whether there can ever be a likeness between the "loveliness of beings" and the "splendours of the Supreme".

*All shapelessness whose kind admits of pattern and form, as long as it remains outside of Reason and Idea, is ugly by that very isolation from the Divine-Thought.*

*But where the Ideal-Form has entered, it has grouped and co-ordinated what from a diversity of parts was to become a unity: it has rallied confusion into co-operation: it has made the sum one harmonious coherence: for the Idea is a unity and what it moulds must come to unity as far as multiplicity may. (I.6.ii)*

The beauty that we perceive in a work of art is beautiful insofar as it participates with the eternal idea that shapes its meaning. Plotinus acknowledges that material substance can indeed be beautiful, convincingly demonstrated by the beauty we perceive in nature and in art. Notwithstanding, this can only happen when artificer and perceiver participate with the transcendent models provided by the gods.

Plotinus allows the external forms of beauty, its *symmetria* and harmony of parts to have beauty, but he describes it as "borrowed beauty", one that "shares" in the ideal form. He retains the concept of *kalon* as "that which pleases", but creates a new likeness for the beautiful as "revelation" and "spiritualization of matter". Matter is not in itself beautiful. It is the eternal form "communicated" to it that gives substance its being.

*The guiding thought is this: that the beauty perceived on material things is borrowed. The pattern giving beauty to the corporeal rests upon it as Idea to its Matter and the substrate may change and from being pleasant become distasteful, a sign, in all reason, that the beauty comes by participation.*

*Two causes in their degree; the participation in beauty and the power of the Soul, the maker, which has imprinted that form. (V.9.ii)*

A material universe is necessary to substantiate and make immanent an active *theos*. Matter is also necessary to our world. However, it is "alone", because it does not hold to the specific unity that images the transcendental forms it seeks to emulate. Art takes its image by participating with its transcendental archetypes. The beauty of the intellectual forms we perceive in art is appropriated from the ultimate unity of its Source and Maker.

*Applying the same method to the total of things, here too we discover the Intellectual-Principle [Divine Mind] and this we set down as veritably the [Truth] maker and creator of All. The underly has adopted, we see, certain shapes by which it becomes fire, water, air, earth [the elements of art]; and these shapes have been imposed upon it by something else.*

*This other is Soul which, hovering over the Four [the elements], imparts the pattern of the Cosmos, the Ideas for which it has itself received from the Intellectual-Principle as the soul or mind of the craftsman draws upon his craft for the plan of his work. (V.9.iii)*

This procession from matter to spirit describes our dialectical ascent. Plotinus gives an account of the intellectual activity, some would say psychological exercises, through which we discover the cosmogonic nature of art, demonstrating how Primal Beauty causes things to happen. The key here is what Plotinus calls the "two causes". The first prescribes a theological metaphysics of affinity and participation. The second establishes its necessary existential component, the individual human agent that models himself after Zeus, maker of all that Art presents.

The work of art comes about by virtue of the artificer, and ideal beauty is communicated through the artist to the work by skill of mind. This is how art "happens". However, Plotinus understands the ideal form differently from his predecessors. For Plato, the idea is a transcendent form, while for Plotinus it is a "lived-existent", one that lies within human experience. The artificer is in one sense the creator of a work of art, but in another sense he is not. The artist remains creative only in so far as he does not imitate the material substances of an external reality. The artificer participates with the transcendent archetype integral to his beautiful soul. The aesthetic forms we apprehend in the work of

art are not so much the creation of the artist, but an images of the eternal exemplar archetypes.

Art is placed between our profane ontic world of the everyday and the sacred ontological realm that constitutes its being. Art pictures the "other" by way of appropriation and affinity. It is of this world because it represents real things and visible shapes as "own". Art is also of the divine realm, because it presents itself as the existential aspect of the Divine Mind. The beauty of art is contemplated quietly. Art is the creative ground that opens our understanding to a sanctified existence.

*At once [the artist] forms a multiple unity with the God silently present; in the degree of his power and will, the two become one; should he turn back to the former duality, still he is pure and remains very near to the God; he has but to look again and the same presence is there. (V.8.xi)*

*Consider, even the case of pictures; those seeing by the bodily sense the productions of the art of painting do not see the one thing in the one only way; they are deeply stirred by recognizing in the objects depicted to the eyes the presentation of what lies in the idea, and so are called to recollection of the truth. (II.9.xvi)*

## ART AND NATURE

Plotinus is too often remembered solely for the mystical element he brings to philosophy, a theological metaphysics far removed from the everyday. This characterization is unfortunate. In advancing his concern for humankind in general, Plotinus remains a man very much of this world. He finds beauty both in art and nature. In order to understand the process that establishes the meaning of the being of art as the First Act of the One, we enter upon the cohesive relation art has with the universal *Logos*. We seek after that archetype or exemplar that is "divine animation", and we find it in the overflowing image of the Nature-Principle.

Plotinus now considers the relationship between form and the matter in which it constitutes itself, the role of the ideal and the sensible in artistic production and natural generation.

*As the source of beauty it makes beautiful whatsoever springs from it. And this conferred beauty is not itself in shape; the thing that comes to be is without shape [form], though in another sense shaped; what is denoted by shape is, in itself, an attribute of something else, shapeless at first. Not the beauty but its participant takes shape.*

*Shape and idea and measure will always be beautiful, but the Authentic Beauty and the Beyond-Beauty cannot be under measure and therefore cannot have admitted shape or be Idea: the primal existent, The First, must be without Form; the beauty in it must be simply, the Nature of the Intellectual Good. (VI.7.xxxii,xxxiii)*

Plotinus uses the term shape for the more accepted word form and uses them interchangeably. The word shape seems to be less intellectual, more in line with its iconic demonstration and its sensuous articulation. Matter as such has no form. It is the Universal Soul that gives matter its shape. The concept of creativity that Plotinus advances sustains a theory that art "must be formless". (VI.7.xxxiii)

Of the images already provided for the seminal creativity of nature, the image that serves best is that of "natural generation". Plotinus finds its analogous description in the "skilled production" of the artist, a creative and reasoned process that establishes its naturally constituted transcendent structures in this world as the creative higher *Logos* that animates the very imagination of the artificer. In both cases a new existent comes into being.

The skilful production of art is differentiated from natural generation. The work of art is something that would not have come into existence without human intervention. The artificer, through an act of the will, establishes reason to be the basis of the act that produces a work of art. The objects of nature are images of the Universal Soul. The link is subtle yet instructive. The beauty we perceive in art makes immanent its divine source. New proposals for theory of art are thus advanced. To the extent that art *is*, it presupposes a transcendently constituted beautiful intellect, both to mould and to perceive it. Always the teacher, Plotinus offers advice to the visual artist:

*He must be led, under a system of mental discipline, to beauty everywhere and made to discern the One Principle underlying all, a Principle apart from the material forms, springing from another source, and elsewhere more truly present. (I.3.ii)*

Only after the more important issues have been resolved, Plotinus takes some time out to speak directly to the artificer. Again, he confirms the high esteem he holds for the world of art. This overall existential concern for others is his most endearing human quality.

Essentially, there are two paths to knowledge of the meaningful constituents of art: There is a knowing derived from "discursive assertions", and there is the more elevated wisdom gained through our meditations on the *eikōi* of "divine inscription", the "consecrated specimens" worthy of our consideration. Only certain types of knowledge can be reached through reasoned propositions. Plotinus establishes the dialectical Upward Way as a learning more primal, an understanding intuitively grasped by way of the image. Both "figurative" and "direct" knowledge is achieved in the region of art, where the wisdom of an ancient *ethos* is expressed not in reasoned propositions but through images. Through Art we attain to a vision of the Being of beings, and embrace its transcendent order. Art opens the invisible realm of *theos* to our view.

The artist produces a work of art by shaping or giving form to primordial matter, mirroring the infinite patterns of beauty provided by the eternal archetypes, for everything in this world has its exemplar model in the realm of the gods. The visual artist participates with the higher *Logos* in producing a work of art, a meaningful composition of the matter of art in its own image.

*From natural things we turn to the artificial. Every art in all its operation aims at whatsoever unity its capacity and its models permit, though Being [Intellectual-Principle] most achieves unity since it is closer at the start. (VI.2.xi)*

An experience of the total order of *cosmos* embraces the artificer, rendering sensible the ideal, gathering the fragmentary into unity. (I.6.iii) The artist recollects by way of contemplation and appropriation to that wisdom embodied



in the very soul of his being. (V.8.v) The final statement on this subject follows: From the One to the One – from ineffable quietude to aesthetic contemplation. Plotinus readmits both producer and perceiver of beauty to their theological ground. The practical beauty of Plotinian dialectic is that the forgotten gods have been retrieved. Plotinus has recollected their authority through the unveiling power of *alētheia*, the enduring Truth of their existence, and returns the divine exemplars to their rightful place, again active in the world as human existence.

### THE DIVINE INTELLIGIBLES

Before entering into the spiritual elements of an intelligible universe, Plotinus suggests we revisit the operations of an intellect that designates some things to be beautiful. To facilitate our understanding of the process that ordains something to be a work of art, Plotinus refers us to the transcendent operations of judgement.

*And the soul includes a faculty peculiarly addressed to Beauty – one incomparably sure in the appreciation of its own, never in doubt whenever any lovely thing presents itself for judgement.*

*Nonetheless, a thing is beautiful in itself; as related to something else it is either more or less beautiful. Similarly, an object is great in itself, and its greatness is due, not to any external, but to its own participation in the Absolute Great. (VI.3.xi)*

With this art for art's sake argument, Plotinus enters upon the non-corporeal spiritual elements that remain at the centre of his theory of art. They are the ideas that sustain our discussion, the Beauty and Ultimate Truth of Art.

*This is why we read of "Truth introduced into the Mixture" and of the "measuring standard as a prior condition" and are told that symmetry and beauty necessary to the Mixture come Thence into whatever has beauty.*

*It is in this way that we have our share in Beauty; but in another way, also, we achieve the truly desirable, that is by leading our selves up to what is best within us; the best is what symmetry, beauty, collective Idea, life clear, Intellective and good. (VI.7.xxx)*

Plotinus refers to the dialogue Socrates has with Protarchus on the manner in which we are to think the Absolute as the Good.

SOCRATES: But there is still a certain thing we must have, and nothing in the world could come into being without it.

PROTARCHUS: What is it?

SOCRATES: Reality, for a thing with which we don't mean to mix reality will never really come into being, and if it ever did it wouldn't continue in being.

PROTARCHUS: Quite so.

SOCRATES: Then if we cannot hunt down the good under a single form, let us secure it by the conjunction of three, beauty, proportion, and truth, and then, regarding these three as one, let us assert that *that* may most properly be held to determine the qualities of the mixture, and that because *that* is good the mixture itself has become so. (Plato, *Philebus* 64,65)

We are advised that the individual soul is passionate in its pursuit of the truth that sustains the beauty of its intended good works.

*There indeed all it saw was beautiful and veritable; it grew in strength by being thus filled with the fire of the True; itself becoming veritable Being and attaining veritable knowledge, it enters by that neighbouring into conscious possession of what it has long been seeking. (VI.7.xxxii)*

The epistemological model Plotinus provides is not founded on sensible perceptions nor on the concepts derived from them. Above them stands the path of *gnosis*, always contemplating its Source, where "the origin of all this must be formless", not as lacking shape but as the origin of even intellectual form. (VI.7.xxxii) The model of creativity advanced by Plotinus is formulated on the generative power of Lady Nature, that which bestows beauty to our natural world. We conclude that the All-Soul of existence is a vision of the intuitive self, the Individual Archetype, its Truth image attainable through the works of nature and art.

*Consider, even the case of pictures: those seeing by the bodily sense the proportions of the art of painting do not see the one thing in the only way; they are deeply stirred by recognizing in the objects depicted to the eyes the presentation of what lies in the idea and so are called to recollection of the truth.*

*They will think of the Intellectual Sphere which includes within itself the Idea-Form realized in the Kosmos. They will think of the Souls, in their ordered rank, that produce incorporeal magnitude and lead the Intelligible out towards spatial extension, so that finally the thing of process becomes, by its magnitude, as adequate a representation as possible of the principle void of parts which is its model. (II.9.xvi-xvii)*

The transcendent operations of judgement that preclude on art confirms that the higher beauty of the intuitive soul that lies within. Because our longing for truth is not the test by which we decide on the nature and quality of our ascent, Plotinus refers to the dialectical structures of judgement. We apply a method that finds "opposition of things", in a word, being and becoming, continuity against dissolution, achieving "all that a reasoned life aims at". (VI.7.xx)

*The perception of Beauty and the awe and the stirring of passion towards it are for those already in some degree knowing and awakened.*

*Again; all that have possessed themselves of The Good feel it sufficient: they have attained the end: but Beauty not all have known and those that have judged it to exist for itself and not for them, as in the charm of this world the beauty belongs only to its possessor. (V.5.xii)*

Art is the path of *gnosis*, a sanctified way of being in the world. This is our epistemological goal, a learning meditation that opens our understanding to the ultimate good of an intelligible universe.

*We need not carry this matter further; we turn to a question already touched but demanding still some brief consideration.*

*Knowledge of The Good or contact with it, is the all-important: this – we read – is the grand learning, the learning we are to understand, not of looking towards it but attaining, first, some knowledge of it.*

*We come to this learning by analogies, by abstractions, by our understanding of its subsequents, of all that is derived from The Good, by the upward steps towards it. (VI.7.xxxvi)*

Plotinus again refers to Socrates:

By no means, said I, but you ask the question. You certainly have heard it often, but now you enter do not apprehend or again you are minded to make trouble for me by attacking the argument.

I suspect it is rather the latter. For you have often heard that the greatest thing to learn is the idea of good by reference to which just things and all the rest become useful and beneficial. (Plato, *Republic*, 504)

We are reminded that even without knowledge of the fundamental relation between the totality of creation and the Good, possession without true understanding is simply an "availing" that is unauthentic. When Plotinus likens the *cosmos* to the artwork of Ouranus, he acknowledges that *theos* constitutes its particular hue.

*We are like people ignorant of painting who complain that the colours are not beautiful everywhere in the picture: but the Artist has laid on the appropriate tint to every spot.*

*Suppose the Universe were the direct creation of the Reason-Principle applying itself, quite unchanged, to Matter, retaining, that is, the hostility to partition which it derives from its Prior, the Intellectual-Principle – then, this its product, so pronounced, would be of supreme and unparalleled excellence. (III.2.xi)*

Those of us who have retained to the "word" of the philosophical assertions Plotinus has made have yet to ascend to the "picture" method of highest knowing, the *eikōn*. Perhaps not unlike the visual artist who, either through psychological compulsion or intellectual necessity, partakes with the eternal images and paradigms provided by the ancient gods, we seek the pathway that leads to authentic understanding. For the "lover" there is no rest, the quest for beauty is eternal. Meditations on the intelligible beauty of *cosmos* and the eternal forms, Beauty, Truth and Good, sustain our dialectical ascent.

*[We] cannot deny that the Soul [Zeus] of the Kosmos has exercised such a weight of power as to have brought the corporeal-principle, in itself unlovely, to partake of good and beauty to the utmost of its receptivity – and to a pitch which stirs Souls, beings of the divine order. (II.9.xvii)*

Plotinus returns to the ancient *mythos* that gives authority to his vision, the mythological images of the divine exemplars. He personifies *cosmos* and in so doing sanctifies the corporeal necessity of human existence.

*Nor would it be sound to condemn this Kosmos as less than beautiful, as less than the noblest possible in the corporeal; and neither can any charge be laid against its source. (III.2.iii)*

The body that gives shape or form to the intuitive soul is necessary in order to manifest a "higher Kind engendering in its own likeness". (III.2.iii)

*This thing that has come into Being is the Kosmos complete: do but survey it, and surely this is the pleading you will hear:*

*I am made by a God: from that God I came perfect above all forms of life, adequate to my function, self-sufficing, lacking nothing: for I am the container of all, that is, of every plant and every animal, of all the Kinds of created things, and many Gods and nations of Spirit-Beings and lofty soul and men happy in their goodness. (III.2.iii)*

When Plotinus acknowledges the hard work that constitutes our anthropomorphic embrace of Primal Beauty, he returns to the "more compact" images of *mythopoietic* understanding. The iconic method better serves to impact our understanding. It is indeed hard work to achieve to the beauty of mind Plotinus prescribes. Perhaps it is nigh to unattainable, the image of eternal return is always present.

The second All-Beautiful offspring of *theos* is Zeus, sovereign over the sensible universe, creator of the realm of art, that which opens to a sanctified place or ground for the shaping of the eternal ideas. Art is the mirror image of its engendering creator, Ouranus.

*Still the manifested God cannot think that he has come forth in vain from the father; for through him another universe has arisen, beautiful as the image of beauty, and it could not be lawful that Beauty and Being should fail of a beautiful image.*

*This second Kosmos at every point copies the archetype: it has life and being in copy, and has beauty as springing from that diviner world. In its character of image it holds, to that divine perpetuity without which it would only at times be truly representative; for every image whose existence lies in the nature of things must stand during the entire existence of the archetype. (V.8.xii)*

Ultimately, the universe unfolds as intelligible beauty, the divine artwork of a benevolent God. The image of creativity that Plotinus provides achieves the sublime objectivity he seeks to portray.

*And indeed if the divine did not exist, the transcendently beautiful, in a beauty beyond all thought, what could be lovelier than the things we see? Certainly no reproach can rightly be brought against this world save only that it is not That. (V.8.viii)*

We create an image that brings everything that exists into view, each "orb" a vision of its "particular transcendence".

*Bring this vision actually before your sight so that there shall be in your mind the gleaming representation of a sphere, a picture holding sprung, themselves, of that universe and repose or some at rest, some in motion.*

*Keep this sphere before you, and from it imagine another, a sphere, before you, and from it imagine another, a sphere stripped of magnitude and of spatial differences; cast out your inborn sense of Matter, taking care not merely to attenuate it: call on God, maker of the sphere whom image you now hold, and pray Him to enter.*

*And may He come bringing His own Universe with all the Gods that dwell in it – He who is the one God and all the gods, where each is all, blending into a unity, distinct in power but all one god in virtue of that one divine power of many facets. (V.8.ix)*

Plotinus provides us an image perhaps not as familiar as that described by Ezekiel, but a vision of God nevertheless, of spheres within spheres, so to speak, "wheels within wheels". (Ezekiel, 1: 1-28) Ouranus, Kronus, Zeus and Rhea energize his kinetic vision. Plotinus constitutes a divine plurality more in keeping with the powerful All-Unity of the Transcendent Function that images the Ideal Archetype of a fully developed human existence, completing the "divine Triplicity" of Plato. It is an image of incredible strength, beauty and great proportion, indeed beyond the normal bounds of human reason, one that is achieved through the synthesizing power of the intuitive soul.

We are presented with a description of a fully developed and integrated persona, the Authentic Self projected into theory of art; an astute understanding of the psychology of art not before achieved. Our encounter with the God-image within includes the other archetypes as participants and presupposes their having been successfully integrated. The increase in dialectical understanding that occurs through the transcendent faculty is a sign that integration of these psychological, not metaphysical, forces is possible.

In addition to the archetypes mentioned are the "picture elements" such that the imagination provides – symbols of the sought after All-Unity – in which the parts are held together by an image of the whole. Plotinus follows Plato in establishing the *hieroglyph* or "divine inscriptions" of the Egyptians to be our best examples. (V.8.vi) Plotinus summarizes:

*This then is Beauty primally: it is entire and omnipresent as an entirety; and therefore in none of its parts or members lacking in beauty; beautiful thus beyond denial.*

*Certainly it cannot be anything [be, for example, Beauty] without being wholly that thing; it can be nothing which it is to possess partially or in which it utterly fails [and therefore it must entirely be Beauty entire].*

*At once [the artificer] forms a multiple unity with the God silently present; in the degree of his power and will, the two become one. (V.8.viii,xi)*

## THE WAY THROUGH ART

The rewards of our ascent are many. The beauty of that precious part of philosophy leads to *gnosis*, a revelation that impacts on our lived world. Recovery of an ancient *ethos* is accomplished. Art overturns a fallen scientific world to a sanctified human existence. The way of art is difficult. From birth, human beings live in a world of the sensible more than in the realm of ideas. Our everyday experience partakes in material things, an unfortunate circumstance that contributes finally to meaninglessness in human endeavour. However, there are others that elevate themselves above the mundane to a higher power, one that lifts the shroud off the unfulfilling world into which they have been thrown.

*It is to be reached by those who, born with the nature of the lover, are also authentically philosophic by inherent temper; in pain of love towards beauty but not held by material loveliness, taking refuge from that in things whose beauty is of the soul.*

*And thence, rising still a step, reach to the source of this loveliness of the Soul, thence to whatever be that above that again, until uttermost is reached. (V.9.ii)*

Plotinus rhetorically questions whether the intelligible universe contains shapes only of things sensible. In so doing, he refers to the etymological origin of term

*mimesis* as liturgy and ritual, imitating the "dance-play" of *cosmos*. The mimetic arts, for example, painting, sculpture and dance, are based in the sensible, imitating the ideal forms of a higher reality, indirectly giving shape to the symmetry of all life. In that there is a kind of order that constitutes the Divine Mind, a transcendent symmetry made visible in the work of art, it establishes the Plotinian tenet that "man exists in the Supreme". (V.9.xii)

Plotinus returns to the ground of his existential concern. A more caring and humane *ethos* is recovered. The utter meaninglessness of a prevailing scientific humanism is transcended.<sup>45</sup> We have recollected the unwavering transcendently constituted "moral value" that speaks to the human spirit.

*Man has come into [authentic] existence, a living being but not a member of the noblest order; he occupies by choice an intermediate rank; still, in that place in which he exists, Providence does not allow him to be reduced to nothing; on the contrary he is ever being led upwards by all those varied devices which the Divine employs in its labour to increase the dominance of moral value.*

*The human race, therefore, is not deprived by Providence of its rational being; it retains its share though necessarily limited, in wisdom, intelligence, executive power and right doing, the right doing, at least, of individuals to each other.*

*Man is, therefore, a noble creature, as perfect as the scheme allows; a part, no doubt, in the fabric of the All, he yet holds a lot higher than that of all the other living things of earth. (III.2.ix)*

Higher does not mean "dominion over" (Genesis, 1: 28); the image is logical, not biblical. The stars and the planets are but coextensive parts of the noble order of *cosmos*, just as humankind is part of the Universal All, moving always towards its "ultimate potential" as a "freely acting cause", the "efficient act" of authentic human dwelling.

*Nor is the force of the celestial Movements such as to leave us powerless: if the universe were something outside and apart from us it would stand as its makers willed so that, once the gods had done their part, no man, however impious, could introduce anything contrary to their intention.*



*But as things are, efficient act does come from men: given the starting Principle, the secondary line, no doubt, is inevitably completed; but each and every principle contributes towards the sequence. Now Men are Principles, or, at least, they are moved by their characteristic nature towards all that is good, and that nature is a Principle, a freely acting cause. (III.2.x)*

There are many ways into the world of art, for example, historical, anthropological, psychological, iconological, theological and philosophical. Plotinus opens our field of vision so that it embraces the totality of its experience. He effectively uses the creative process we call art to image the benevolent overflowing of an Ultimate Good and he uses the work of art to name the achievement produced by *techne*, the skilled works of the maker.

Art is a becoming process that signifies to understanding the objects produced by an authentically beautiful intellect. It is this transcendent existent that directs the life-affirming hand in its manipulation of primordial matter. Art constitutes both the artist and the work of art produced. The work of art is an ennoblement of our sensible natural world, a transformation produced not merely by the artificer, but by the transcendent model that guides its making.

Art presupposes certain principles that enable its products to be called works of art. The concept of art is presented for that matter as even being possible. In the case of painting, which Plotinus distinguishes from the other arts, a beautiful painting arises from an intellectual skill for which no definite law can be given. "It is more and more the bare form that reaches us, stripped, so to speak, of magnitude as of all other quality". (II.8.1)

Addressing ancient theoretical problems such as cause and effect, being and becoming, the universal and the particular, *phenomena* and *noumena*, Plotinus finds that the process of artistic production provides him with an exemplary analytic model. Plotinian theory of art advances on a theory of creativity that embraces the All-Unity of its message, and attempts to explain the constitutive elements of art, or at least address their motivation. Through an understanding that permits us knowledge of how the artificer "works" when making the beautiful appear, Plotinus teaches us how the Divine Intellect

works, while at the same time providing a model for an altered way of being in the world.

*The solution is in understanding the virtues and what each has to give: thus the man will learn to work [dwell and think] with this or that as every several need demands. And as he reaches to loftier principles and other standards these in turn will define his conduct. (I.2.vii)*

Plotinus continues by pointing towards the divine model in which our retrieved authentic human existence finds its Ideal Archetype or exemplar.

*For example, Restraint in its earlier form will no longer satisfy; he will work for the final Disengagement; he will live, no longer, the human [resource] life of the good man – such as Civic Virtue commends – but, leaving this beneath him, will take up instead another life, that of the Gods.*

*For it is to the Gods, not to the Good, that our likeness must look: to model ourselves upon good men is to produce an image of an image: we have to fix our gaze above the image and attain Likeness to the Supreme Exemplar. (I.2.vii)*

Art has various aims. For Plotinus, the proper function of the work of art is to invest things with divine form, thereby bringing Ultimate Meaning into our everyday life. His theory of art identifies the fundamental affinity of the one with the other, the sacred and the profane.

There are therefore three Plotinian contributions to the history of ideas: His philosophical theology or metaphysics, his aesthetics or philosophy of beauty, and his theory of art. The concept of art as quality and not as a relation between parts, the recognition of the intellectual element in beauty, and the admission of a transcendently constituted ideal form as the proper object of art, are all enduring contributions to a new way of doing theory of art.<sup>46</sup>

*As it is not for those to speak of the graceful forms of the material world who have never seen them or known their grace; in the same way those must be silent upon the beauty of noble conduct and of learning and all that order who have never cared for such things. (I.6.iv)*

Identity and affinity have served our ascent upward. Recovery of the Authentic Self or God-image at the centre of our existential soul, establishes our human freedom. The beauty of a world ordered on eternal principles advances radical

paradigms for culture and its institutions. We are rewarded with a character-building *ethos* in which to dwell.

*[We] must be led, under a system of mental discipline, to beauty everywhere and made to discern the One Principle underlying all, a Principle apart from the material forms, springing from another source, and elsewhere more truly present. (I.3.ii)*

Our soul has been stirred by the "loveliness" that permeates the All of existence. Art is our way into the light of that eternal realm. The object of our longing is always at hand, in direct purview of each individual who seeks to participate with its final good.

*Each in the solitude of himself shall behold that solitary dwelling Existence, the Apart, the Unmingled, the Pure, from Which all things depend, for Which all look and live and act and know, the Source of Life and of Intellection and of Being.*

*This is the spirit that Beauty [and Art] must ever induce, wonderment and a delicious trouble, longing and love and a trembling that is all delight. (I.6.vii,iv)*



## CHAPTER V: CRITICAL ISSUES

### THE MYSTICAL ELEMENT

The previous chapter describes a mental discipline essential to dialectical ascent, the Upward Way. We have followed Plotinus as he describes the transcendent structures of *meta-noia*, a unitary manner of thinking crucial to establishing the link between human experience and the intellectual operations that makes art happen.

Our goal is to become as close to God as possible, from the One to the One, eternal procession and return. We partake in a sanctified *gnosis*, a learning that embraces the "solitary dwelling" of infinite quietude. Plotinus tells us that the possession of this knowledge is not to be treated lightly. This new way of being in the world is "authentic composure", the intellectual artwork of *theos*, an image that resides in the innermost reaches of the soul, a picture of profound simplicity. We return from this ecstatic achievement with an *ethos* to share our accomplishment, to be with others as we ourselves have become shaped in the image of God. The epistemological ascendancy is insightful and establishes a way of life through which human endeavour derives its meaning.

Thus far we have not entered a critical examination of a system that so effectively demonstrates the fundamental relationship between art, religion and culture. Notwithstanding, there always remains the difficult problem of Plotinian mysticism, "each in the solitude of himself". (I.6.vii) There also is the fundamental *chorismos* or "divisive arrangement" between the mental and the material advanced by Neoplatonism in general. From within this perspective, arguments that posit both "identity" and "difference" to the ideal and the sensible, form and matter, mind and body are demonstrated.

Like Plato, Plotinus addresses the problem of philosophical language or "speech" when he acknowledges the difficulty in advancing metaphysical concepts like Being, Not-Being and Non-Being. These fundamental ontological concerns reflect the content of an epistemological process that quietly achieves to meaningful rewards. I think now is as good a time as any to

introduce some of the more important features that attach to these perennial issues from within the Plotinian context, for they are the imperishable subjects of all philosophical theology.

Edward Caird rightly draws our attention to the problematical mystical element in Plotinus. He notes that the Plotinian system is "from the One, to the One", hence "the flight of the alone to the alone". (VI.9.xi) In so arguing, Caird tells us that "the mystic is meant to let go of everything that could describe the One in which he wishes to lose even himself".<sup>47</sup> Whether Plotinus succeeds in establishing Art as the "image" and not the "name" of the ineffable One, matters little for the moment, for it simply indicates the problem that language brings to philosophy. Caird also identifies the Plotinian system as developing out of the "extremest forms of Greek dualism" – Form and Matter.<sup>48</sup> This problem he calls the *chorismos* of Plotinian unity, for it establishes an irreconcilable abyss between the two "primals", the ideal and the sensible, essentially the thought and the thinker.

As far as Kronus, the *Nous* or Divine Mind is concerned, Plotinus tells us that the First Act of the Intellectual-Principle is to think the First Thoughts; thought thinking itself as the "first Categories", Beauty, Truth and the Good. These are the archetypal forms that assist in the formulation of our understanding of *theos*. (V.5.i) This eternal Triplicity is the One Thought of the Divine Intellect. For many readers, the symbiotic relation of multiplicity to specific unity is a difficult idea to assimilate. It is the main problem of Plotinian dialectic: How from the One, the many? Plotinus addresses the abundance that "overflows" from the One from within the context of his analytical description of the Universal Soul. (VI.4.iv).

Kronus, the Divine Mind, and Zeus, the Universal Soul, are always present in the sensible world of existential experience, yet the ideas they image are themselves not extended, for they are simply the ideal objects of a beautiful mind, pure and simple. However, no extension does not mean the absence of "omnipresence". In the *Sixth Ennead* Plotinus presents this argument within

the context of his meditations on the language of "undifferentiated unity" as Authentic Existent. (VI.4; 5.xi) From this point of view, there is no contradiction in the concept "specific unity", for it "gathers together" everything that exists in "affinity", "identity" and "difference", and transcends all oppositions and dualisms.

Material substance is the result of the last step of emanation. Plotinian emanationism serves to protect the monism that pervades the *Enneads*. The dualism perceived in Plotinus is the product of a fallen manner of thinking, one that posits "speech", rather than the "image" to be the House of Being. The secret is to remain within the "place" of the Plotinian exegesis, for a "serious misapprehension" of the more esoteric elements discovered along the way may be caused. We are presented with the most perennial of philosophical questions, the "either / or" of Ultimate Reality, either between spirit and matter, or mind and body. We are free to choose our approach, for the language that gives ultimate meaning to the spiritual can also present itself in the language of the material realist, each presenting the one thought in its own image.

For Plotinus, matter is near "non-being, as indeterminate as the One, albeit in a different way. Thinking the ideal and the sensible as "identity in difference" is difficult, for it eludes even the power of the synthesizing intellect. It is the imagination or "pure reflection" that opens to infinite wisdom, an intention which existentially contains all possible intellectual worlds. In that the One and matter share the epithet "non-being", they share in their identity, "own" with "other", both referring to a common source. Matter is the "ultimate potential". Without the "light of Being" at its nucleus, substance remains the *Lamp Black* of the universe. Only when illumined by the power of the Divine Mind is matter brought into being. Without the hand of God, the "stuff" of art remains "without life" on the pallet.

There also is the problem that holds to the "picture" or iconic method Plotinus brings to theory of art. It is difficult to think the "logic" of picture language, the ideogram essential to his method. Plotinus uses the "holy

images" of a mythologically constituted "pre-logical" way of thinking to retrieve the learning of an ancient teaching.<sup>49</sup> The problem of philosophical language is as constant as the opposed methods of *poiesis* or "making", that of the "picture" and that of the "word". After a course in Plotinian dialectic, we discover that images are the prior objectivities to which the words of *Logos* ultimately refer. Nevertheless there are some important questions that need to be opened. What follows addresses the more problematic philosophical statements Plotinus makes when constituting his theory of art.

### THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

Plotinus indeed recognizes some of the more difficult issues we encounter when thinking on the question of the meaning of the being of art. We are told that "the term Being has not the same sense" when applied to the "various theories" of Greek tradition. (VI.1.i) Plotinus attempts to reconcile the "speech" of philosophy in the *Sixth Ennead*, where he enters into the more rarefied aspects of philosophy of language particular to each "existent" posited.

The metaphysical statements Plotinus makes by way of the image are epistemologically prior to the "less compact" logical propositions of language. (VI.9.v) The method he utilizes establishes a hierarchical order of thinking, one that demonstrates the science of his iconic method. In establishing the limits of language, Plotinus recognizes a level of reality not normally open to us without the *eikōn* or "holy image". In this context, perhaps discursive reasoning is best approached as that which has "fallen" from a manner of thinking that is "more primal". By describing the communicative differences between the image and the word, Plotinus recognizes the fundamental differences between symbol and sign, opposing speech to the more direct picturing of the image. They are fundamentally different ways of making statements about human existence.

## THE IDEAL AND THE SENSIBLE

Plotinus identifies the "common element" of both spirit and substance in his description of the intelligible cosmos, and responds to the perceived dualism some may find in his system.

*It has been remarked that Substance cannot be a single entity common to both the Intellectual and the Sensible worlds. We may add that such community would entail the existence of something prior to Intellectual and Sensible. Substances alike, something distinct from both as predicated of both; and this prior would be neither body nor embodied; for it were one or the other, body would be unembodied, or the unembodied would be the body.*

*This conclusion must not however prevent our seeking in the actual substance of the Sensible world an element held in common by Matter, and rightly so, in spite of those who would have Matter to be the more truly real.*

*Form is usually held to be Substance in a higher degree than Matter, and rightly so, in spite of those who would have Matter to be the more truly real. (VI.1.ii)*

Plotinus describes the relation between the ideal and the sensible, spirit and substance as that between soul and body.

*Two bodies [i.e. by hypothesis, the soul and the human body] are blended, each entire through the entirety of the other: where the one is, the other is also; each occupies an equal extension, and each the whole extension. (IV.7.8.B.x)*

When he refers to the potential that material substance possesses, we are told even on the "absurd supposition" that the potential brings itself to actuality, it must look to that which is not potential but actual.

*No doubt the eternally self-identical may have potentiality and be self-led to self-realization, but even in this case the being considered as actualized is of higher order than the being considered as merely capable of actualization and moving towards a desired Term.*

*Thus the higher is the earlier, and it has a nature other than body, and it exists always in actuality: Intellectual-Principle and Soul precede Nature: thus, Soul does not stand at the level of pneuma or of body.*



*These arguments are sufficient in themselves, though many others have been framed, to show that the soul is not to be thought as a body. (IV.7.8.C.ix)*

The material realist posits substance as the first category, "the more truly real". Plotinus tells us that matter is near non-being, attributing existence to it through the fact that it remains "remote" from the transcendental existent that shapes its being and it is "impossible" to define, for even if we did determine its "property", we still would not have established its "essence".

*Perhaps we should rather speak of some single category, embracing Intellectual Substance, Matter and Form, and the Composite of Matter and Form. But what is the objection to including everything in a single category, all else of which existence is predicated being derived from that one thing, Existence or Substance? (VI.1.iii)*

## BEING AND NOT-BEING

Plato also acknowledges the difficulty in asserting "that which is not", and that which has "identity in difference", expressing deep dissatisfaction when he had to discuss the existence of "not-being" with the sophists. (*Statesman*, 286, 291)

And what is different is always so called with reference to another thing, isn't it? It would not be so, if existence and difference were not very different things. If difference partook of both characters as existence does, there would sometimes be, within the class of different things, something that was different not with reference to another thing. But in fact we undoubtedly find that whatever is different, as a necessary consequence, is what it is with reference to another. (*Sophist*, 255)

For Plato, the problem is with "syllables" and "names". More to the point, the difficulty is with the discursive signs of "speech". He cites the example of the names "Sophist", "Statesman" and "Philosopher", and asks: "Did they think of all these as a single type, or as two, or did they distinguish three types and attach one of the three corresponding names to each? That is why we must begin by investigating the nature of discourse". (*Sophist*, 217,260)

It seems inconceivable to us that this kind of difficulty could have stood in the way of philosophical progress. Plato shows that if we say "existence" is

"not-being", we do not say that existence is not something or that it is nothing, but merely that it is "other", fundamentally different from "being".

Now that we are agreed, then, that some of the kinds will combine with one another and some will not, and that some combine to a small extent, others with a large number, while some pervade all and there is nothing against their being combined with everything, let us follow up the argument in this way. We will not take all the forms, for fear of getting confused in such a multitude, but choose out some of those that are recognized as most [or very] important, and consider first their several natures and how they stand in respect of being capable of combination with one another.

In this way, though we may not be able to conceive being and not-being with perfect clearness, we may at least give as satisfactory an account of them as we can under the conditions of our present inquiry, and see if there is any opening allowing us to assert that what is not, *really is* what is not, and escape unscathed. (*Sophist*, 254)

## MATTER AND FORM

Plotinus further asks in what manner "speech" can describe itself as "becoming" and then be classified as a category or quality. He tells us that verbs and nouns are the "matter" of speech, that which imposes form on its demonstration. Speech or naming is for Plotinus an act, not a quality. (VI.1.v)

*We have explained our conception of Reality [True Being] and considered how far it agrees with the teaching of Plato. We have still to investigate the opposed principle [the principle of Becoming]. (VI.3.i)*

In acknowledging the difference between the terms "identical" and "analogous", Plotinus reminds us that the subject of our discussion remains the sensible and the ideal.

*Sensible Existence is entirely embraced by what we know as the Universe: our duty, then, would seem to be clear enough – to take this Universe and analyse its nature, classifying its constituent parts and arranging them by species.*

*Suppose that we were making a division of speech: we should reduce its infinity to finite terms, and from the identity appearing in many instances evolve a unity, then another and another, until we arrived at some definite number; each such unit we should call a species if imposed upon individuals, a genus if imposed upon species. Thus, every species of speech – and similarly all phenomena – might be referred to a unity; speech – or element – might be predicated of them all. (VI.3.i)*

Plotinus suggests that any method that imposes genera upon infinity seeks to do the impossible and does not serve the subject at hand. The species is constituted by adding a "difference" to the genus. The genus is predicated of the species but not conversely. The word species contains, so to speak, more information than the word genus. We must seek new genera for the universe, distinct from those produced by the logic of discursiveness, "syllables" and "names", for the universe is different, analogous but never identical. It is but a "likeness" of that which is higher.

*True, it involves the parallel existence of Body and Soul, for the Universe is a living form: essentially however Soul is of the Intellectual and does not enter into the structure of what is called Sensible Being.*

*Our first observation must be directed to what passes in the Sensible realm for Substance. It is, we shall agree, only by analogy that the nature manifested in bodies is designated as Substance, and by no means because such terms as Substance or Being tally with the notion of bodies in flux; the proper term would be Becoming. (VI.3.i,ii)*

Plotinus states that becoming is not uniform in nature. For example, becoming may be divided into matter and the form that is "communicated" to it as that which "composes" its being. This being the case, each may be considered a separate genus, or may be thought of as a single category, substance. Plotinus bravely addresses the perceived dualism in the problem of matter and form:

*But what, we may ask, have Matter and Form in common? In what sense can Matter be conceived as a genus, and what will be its species? What is the differentiae of Matter? In which genus, Matter or Form, are we to rank the composite of both?*

*It may be this very composite which constitutes the Substance manifested in bodies, neither of the components by itself answering to the conception of Body.*

*How, then, can we rank them in one and the same genus as the composite? How can the elements of a thing be brought within the same genus as the thing itself? (VI.3.ii)*

When Plotinus reflects on the problem of the "elements" of a thing, he asks us why we should not resort to analogy, for any classification of the sensible cannot advance along the identical lines marked out by the ideal or intellectual.

*Is there any reason why we should not for Intellectual-Being substitute Matter, and for Intellectual-Motion substitute Sensible Form, which is in a sense the life and consummation of Matter? The inertia of Matter would correspond with Stability [Being], while the Identity and Difference of the Intellectual would find their counterparts in the similarity and diversity [Becoming] which obtain in the sensible realm.*

*Matter does not possess or acquire Form as its life or its Act; Form enters it from without, and remains foreign to its nature. Secondly, Form in the Intellectual is an Act and a motion; in the Sensible Motion is different from Form and accidental to it.*

*Form in relation to Matter approximates rather to Stability than to Motion; for by determining Matter's indetermination it confers upon it a sort of repose. (VI.3.ii)*

For Plotinus, the higher realm of Art presupposes the specific-unity of identity and difference. The world participates with difference, always in relation to some other. "Identity and Difference are here predicated of the particular, which is not, as in that realm, posterior". (VI.3.ii)

Plotinus advises that this manner of thinking division must be abandoned. We first "distinguish" matter and form, the composition and attributes of said mixture, its "predicates" and its "accidents". Matter is common to all substance, but not as a genus for "matter has no *differentiæ*". If form is added to this equation, "Matter separates that Form from other Forms: It does not embrace the whole of Substantial Form [as, to be the genus of Form, it must]". (VI.3.iii) Form is the "creator" of substance and is the shape of the Reason-Principle as matter is substance dependent upon form.

We still have not come to understand the essence of substance, for what we have discovered are the "mere predicates" of substance, those things that fall under the category of "relation".

*Substantial Form is never a predicate, since it never acts as a modification of anything. Form is not an attribute of Matter [hence, is not predicable of Matter]; it is simply a constituent of the Couplement.*

*We conclude that nothing belonging to something else and predicated of it can be Substance. Substance is that which belongs essentially to itself [alone], or, in so far as it is a part of the differentiated object, serves only to complete the Composite.*

*Each of either part of the Composite belongs to itself, and is only affirmed of the Composite in a special sense: only qua part of the whole is it predicated of something else; qua individual it is never in its essential nature predicated of an external. (VI.3.iv)*

Even though substance may be claimed a common element in both matter and form, it is but a "substrate" of matter, what Plotinus calls form and its "couplement". "The mode in which Matter is the substrate of Form is different from that in which form and the Couplement are substrates of their modification". (VI.3.iv) Form is the completion of matter, "as pure potentiality demands".

*Moreover, Form cannot be said to reside in Matter [as in a substrate]. When one thing combines with another to form a unity, the one does not reside in the other; both alike are substrates of a third: thus, Man [the Form] and a man [the Composite] are substrates of their experience, and are prior to their activities and consequences,*

*Substance, then, is that from which all other things proceed and to which they owe their existence; it is the centre of passivity and the source of action. (VI.3.iv)*

## IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

For Plotinus, even the One is attributable only to that which opposes the manifold superseded, where emanation or the "downward way" speaks through the language of metaphor. The emanationist hypothesis that Plotinus advances indeed resorts to the more compact images that metaphor provides. Addressing the "motionless motion" that constitutes the "not-being" of the One, which is, so to speak, prior to the emanation process that brings *cosmos* into becoming, Plato states the following:

*It must, then, be possible for 'that which is not' [i.e., is different from existence] to be [exist], not only in the case of motion but of all the other kinds. For in the case of them all the nature of difference makes each one of them different from existence and so makes it a thing that 'is not', and hence we shall be right to speak of them all on the same principle as things that in this sense 'are not', and, again, because they partake of existence, to say that they 'are' [exist] and call them things that have being [existence]. (Sophist, 256)*

Plotinus follows Plato in attributing to the One the "potential" for being. So called "motionless motion" is perhaps best understood as the "not-being" that

preceded the "big bang" which made intelligible the totality of existence. This problem is one of the fundamental issues of theology, for "in the beginning" *creatio ex nihilo* posits a nothing but an insubstantial God to exist.

In most world religions creation or cosmogony is understood as the making of *cosmos* from a prior state, whether from chaos or the body of an insubstantial *theos*.<sup>50</sup> Plotinus advances a hypothesis that supports the production of the universe as an emanation of the Divine Mind. This entails a creation theory that posits everything that *is* as being permanent, an image of an idea eternally in the process of becoming. The transcendent operations of two cognitive fields are opened. First, the language of "speech" permits this actual or "universal object" to exist as the "particular subject" of individual change. Second, the ideographic "saying" of the holy *eikōn* establishes the theatre in which the word art participates.

Nikolai Berdyaev posits that authentic human being is like God, always creative. In addition to an eternal *theos*, he also identifies the infinite *Ungrund* or "nothingness" out of which the everything of creation unfolds.<sup>51</sup> For Berdyaev, the notion of human freedom is a creation *ex nihilo* and is humankind's completion of the divine project. The being of the universe is a continuous becoming, a process of development that occurs both in God and man. Like Plotinus, Berdyaev stresses the idea of freedom as self-creation, and our role as co-creators with *theos* of the continuous becoming of an intelligible *cosmos* to our understanding. Plato concludes our meditations on the Plotinian abyss between identity and difference, the "this" and the "not that":

Motion, then, is both the same and not the same; we must admit that without boggling at it. For when we say it is 'the same' and 'not the same' we are not using the expression in the same sense; we call it 'the same' on account of its participation in the same with reference to itself, but we call it 'not the same' because of its combination with difference, a combination that separates it off from the same [sameness] and makes it not the same but different, so that we have the right to say this time that it is 'not the same'. (*Sophist*, 256)

The issue of identity and difference can of course take the different approach advocated by Edmund Husserl, who gives soul or *psyche* the profane term "consciousness", a self-intuiting mental operation that intuits itself as "other" to the consciousness that you or I may or may not possess as "own". Since we participate with others in the world, the only thing that can be said of this experience is that we share an affinity in what finally is its objective reference, the one transcendent "inter-subjectivity" in which we all participate.<sup>52</sup>

### PICTURES AND WORDS

Renewed interest in Ludwig Wittgenstein assists in bringing a fresh perspective to the perennial issues of philosophy".<sup>53</sup> Advocating "elementary facts" as the subject matter of empirical science, Wittgenstein holds that the primary purpose of language is to state facts. It does this by "picturing". When a fact is so pictured we find that there is a "structural similarity" between the language used to describe said picture and what is pictured. Wittgenstein identifies the secondary purpose of language is to state tautologies or propositions that are true by virtue of their form alone. We are informed that these tautologies tell us nothing, but that their use is necessary. Any proposition that fails either to picture a fact, or to express a tautology, is "nonsense".

Wittgenstein subsequently rejected the logic of this earlier attitude to the problem of language. His new approach to the subject suggested that in place of thinking language as having a single purpose, we should view it as serving many purposes, each defining a "language game".<sup>54</sup> Language games include the picturing of facts, but the concept of picturing is expanded to include the worlds of many other types of games, for example, theory of art, metaphysics and theology.

As we come to understand the language utilized in a given forum, Wittgenstein tells us we are doing philosophy in the sense that we are able to overcome our philosophical perplexity concerning the use to which language is being put. We are offered a viable option. Rather than supposing that provocative terms like "non-being", "not-being" and "being" stand for the same

thing in the same way in each instance of usage, or that there are features common to every particular usage, one will expect to find nothing more than "family resemblances" or "analogies" among the instances of usage. Plotinus had in him the root of the matter, for he returns always to the *mythopoietic* conception he brings to speech.

*Consider, for example, the performers in a choral dance; they sing together though each one has his particular part and sometimes one voice is heard while the others are silent; and each brings to the chorus something of his own; it is not enough that they lift their voices together; each must sing, choicely, his own part to the music set for him. Exactly so in the case of the Soul. (III.6.ii)*

Plotinus tells us that it is impossible to reconcile all theories into his system. He makes a valiant effort to reconcile the basic antagonism between idealism and materialism. Whether he has been successful or not seems of little importance, for he seeks only to show us the Upward Way into the ultimate All-Unity that holds creation together.





## CONCLUSION

### THEOLOGY OF ART

The theory of art that gives existential meaning to the *Enneads* may be called a theology of divine coherence, identity and affinity. It establishes the participation of all finite things with an infinite *theos*. To realize that the Plotinian narrative has a profound concern for humankind, we approach its content through its existential expression. Art is not unlike religion in its largest and most basic motivation, for it is ultimately concerned about individual human existence and about its ultimate meaning.<sup>55</sup> For Plotinus, there is no area of human endeavour that can exist without relation to its unconditioned model. Active participation with *theos* is not to be defined as commerce with the gods or as the ritual activities of theurgy.<sup>56</sup> Nor is religion to be thought as the acceptance of certain dogmas. It is a meditation or inner concentration on the undifferentiated Universal Soul within. To be religious is to be "unconditionally concerned", no matter how secular the fashion in which this concern is expressed.<sup>57</sup>

Plotinian theory of art is a theology of art, for it brings a religious disposition to its existential expression and conveys to us the theological ingredient in everyday life. Art manifests itself in our epistemological and ethical life as an awareness of an unconditional moral demand, and in our aesthetic life as an intention to articulate ultimate meaning. A sanctified way of being in the world is more than an organization of human feelings and disposition for it involves reference to an objective reality outside itself.

We have learned that there are two ways of being in the world. An existence caught up in the everyday follows the reasoning of a scientifically derived profane world. The more elevated path ascends through dialectical exercise to sanctified being. Plotinus gives shape to the cosmogonic elements always "at hand" in an authentically lived human world: The sacred and the profane, that fundamental dynamic which gives existential meaning to both

religion and art. His theology of art finds its model for expressing these two fundamental conditions in the "dance-play" of creation itself.

Insofar as the world is transparent and the meaning of human existence permeates through all forms of thought and action, the work of art points towards the meaningful depth of things. Art is concerned with that which sustains every conditioned meaning and being. It affirms the world as the *Logos* of that which is unconditioned. Art is not merely an experience of something judged beautiful, nor is its epistemological function either theoretical or practical. Its meaning lies in its power to present Actual Being to our view. A "purposeful striving" or *telos* is central to a theory of creativity that posits procession and return as "process", a becoming that identifies "all living entities". Plotinus provides us with an integrative psychology of the archetypes or Ideal Forms, the psychological operations of the Transcendent Function, the image of God within.

Although theoretical and practical applications have a definite relevance for art in general, its principal function is to be distinguished from both theoretical and practical results. Art fulfils a more fundamental symbolic function in the life of the human spirit. Plotinus shows that the meaning to which art strives is a revelation of Pure Being, an intuitive "grasp" of the unconditioned universal *theos* active in the particulars of our world. The standard by which the work of art is judged beautiful or good is on its ability to point beyond its material reality, not to anything within the province of existence as such, but towards the inexhaustible power that animates and gives meaning to existence.

The work of art exists only in order to be overcome and rendered wholly transparent. It is no longer a Kantian *Ding an sich*, but a "medium" through which a transcendent existent "beyond all being" is made manifest. By using mental objects in a way that do not function in the everyday ontic world, Plotinian theory of art captures both the unconditional and the contingent elements in the processes of becoming that makes art appear.<sup>58</sup> To the extent that the work of art intends nothing other than itself, it "makes" immanent an

act of Pure Being, expressing itself as Ultimate Meaning. This wider aspect of aesthetic judgement is brought into focus when the gods of a divine realm are assimilated into our understanding as the higher *Logos*, for it is the *Logos* that gives an *ethos*, "order" and "character", to fine works of art.

Our experience of the meaningful structures inherent in the transcendent operations of art also have a restorative or therapeutic power, the more affective jurisdiction or laws that were practised at the *Aesculapia* at Epidaurus. Plotinus concludes that the question of the meaning of art lies within our own intuitive intellect, the God-image at the Self nexus, for it is through the First Thoughts that the *Logos* relation between "actual existents" are experienced. These psychological facts are recollected within the Ideal Archetype (V.7), the one thought of the Transcendent Function, for it is through the beautiful soul that we discover the ultimate meaning in the Divine All-Unity that Art presents.

Plotinian theory of art is concerned not only with the *ontos* of art, its being, but also with the *logos* of art, its meaning.<sup>59</sup> Plotinus ascends from the unity of individual human souls to the will to meaning that characterizes the human spirit. To the extent that his theory of art posits an active and discoverable divinity at its nucleus, it images the *a priori* structures that "govern" the intuitions integral to authentic thinking. The ever-present origin that Art makes immanent is the First Act of a creative *theos*, an act that transcends the perishable facts of science. The authenticity that our will to meaning effectively demonstrates is the transcendent object which has not yet been thought.

When we apprehend the beautiful in a work of art, we experience a recollecting, a retrieve of an *ethos* or identity, for we intuit something communal and shared with others, an existence that carries forward the possibility of an appropriated identity or existential "worth". Art is that which opens our world to the First Thoughts of God, the eternal forms Beauty, Truth and Goodness. Giving a name to the ineffable One requires an image or "picture" to objectify its Being as Ultimate Meaning. The logic is subtle but instructive. We must not lose sight of the overall cosmogonic significance

Plotinus brings to art, for it is a process that recreates the original ontological unfolding or "overflowing" of Primal Beauty. The work of art seen in this light is a very special kind of symbol, of that higher divine realm to which it points and upon which all individual human experience depends.

Plotinian theory of art opens a dialectic that sustains the very hypothesis of eternal ideas and divine forms. Plotinus adds an antecedent into the meaningful relation the Divine Intelligibles have one to the other. Art is that which is "prior" the affective power of the divine forms, the canvas, as it were, upon which the ideas are ultimately shaped. The Plotinian schema establishes Art as that which engenders itself as the Divine Mind, intellectually establishing itself as "pure abstraction". The First Thoughts of God now have a "place" in which to render themselves visible, and the work of art provides Plotinus with that manifold. He simply does not collapse the One into Art. Art is the image Plotinus grants to the concrete "appearance" of its sacred content and is essential to the iconic method he brings to dialectic, for he demonstrates how the holy *eikōi* establish the meaningful content of discourse on art in general. The cosmogonic image he provides is more in keeping with the totality of the individual archetypes that serve as exemplars of the universal. The meaningful *Logos* operations of art are thus given important ontological significance. Art is that necessary "prior" that gives meaning to creation. Human life cannot but participate with its creative power, for *Art is Beauty is Truth is Good*, all images of the One. Without art authentic understanding cannot be achieved.

### THE WAY OF ART

Plotinus places his lecture *On Beauty* at the beginning of the first series of treatises he gives to Porphyry. It is the *alpha* and *omega* of his narration and there is no better place to begin if we are to accomplish the more practical rewards it presents to the theory of art we have achieved along the way. The realm of art is accomplished only through "dialectical exercise", for it ascends to the beauty of mind necessary to its assimilation as the "place" of authentic understanding or *gnosis*. Our inner concentration recollects an image of the

Ideal Archetype, an operation of *psyche* that individuates through the more irrational elements of human nature. The psychological operations of our existential achievement moves from a willing that forcefully seeks dominion over things to an *ethos* that permits the Being of beings to appear. This movement in thinking from the "fallen" to the "more elevated", from the unauthentic to the authentic, effectively discovers new paradigms for theory of art and culture.

Plotinian philosophy of beauty or aesthetics is well known, for it continues to serve modern scholarship.<sup>60</sup> And yet Plotinus is not concerned with discourse on the beautiful as such. The theory of art that holds to his meditations on creativity testifies to a higher order in which Beauty itself participates. Art, like Lady Nature, is introduced into the transcendental realm of Beauty, Truth and the Good right at the beginning, for to start "we begin by considering the *eikōl*". (V.1.vi) Art and Nature are the creative horizons in which the totality of human existence participates. Plotinus needs both to image the Apollonian and Dionysian ingredients necessary to all creativity.<sup>61</sup>

Plotinus has already given hypostatic identity to Lady Nature in order to image a chthonic realm even more primal than the darkness of the world. He now gives hypostatic identity to Art, for it dwells in a place before the realm of the divine exemplars, that prior realm in which we find the shaping power of creation itself. The ontological status that art achieves in the Plotinian scheme of things is a concrete image of the Divine All-Unity, a creative process in which we participate and find identity. Art is the very image of the One.

Art and Nature are for Plotinus self-motivating, moved by the process of becoming.<sup>62</sup> His theory of art advances the work of art to be a unification of its transcendent objects, Spirit and Nature, and stresses the relevance of the *mythopoietic* content that gives Art and Nature its meaning, for it recognizes the fundamental difference between Ultimate Reality and its intelligible product. The unity of art is, therefore, not disturbed. Art involves a merging of the absolute and relative, necessary and contingent, eternal and temporal,

potential and actual aspects of its being. Art is symbolic of eternal creativity by means of its relation to the not-being of non-being and the fullness of being, an ideal opposition internalized by the fact that the work of art exists. The theory of art advanced by Plotinus therefore enriches the tenets of philosophy of identity where Nature and Art are brought together into a unitary system.<sup>63</sup> Art is placed in the metaphysical context of identity and appropriation.

Our reconstruction of the theory of art and creativity integral to the *Enneads* follows the four basic Plotinian orientations or attitudes: Theoretical, Practical, Aesthetic and Religious.<sup>64</sup> The work of art objectively presents the cosmogonic identity of object and subject, thinker and thought, nature and freedom. An intuitive grasp of these existential features is always at hand.

### BY WHAT IMAGE [?]

Plotinus puts the question thus: By what image can we make visible the divine archetype of Primal Beauty? (V.8.iii) That is to say, how can we render manifest the idea that gives shape to the work of art in question? Plotinus directs his attention to the artificer, for he now seeks to make his message even more concrete.

Plotinus calls our attention to a particular kind of image making, the Egyptian *hieroglyph*.<sup>65</sup> It is not without significance that Plotinus chooses to reintroduce us to the hieroglyph. He is faithful to his indebtedness to Plato, for we are reminded of the highest place Plato gives to the "consecrated specimens" of Egyptian temple inscription and painting. (*Laws II*, 656) Plotinus describes the Egyptian method of pictograph writing:

*The wise of Egypt – whether in precise knowledge or by a prompting of nature – indicated the truth where, in their effort towards philosophical statement, they left aside the writing-forms that take in the detail of words and sentences – those characters that represent sounds and convey the propositions of reasonings – and drew pictures instead, engraving in the temple-inscriptions a separate image for every separate item: a distinct image, an object in itself, an immediate unity, not as aggregate of discursive reasoning and detailed willing. Thus they exhibited the mode in which the Supreme goes forth. (V.8.vi).*

It is this realization that there is a "more direct" way to make philosophical statements about ultimate things that propels Plotinus into the forefront of semiotic theory. He refers to the images of Actual Being that Art and Nature make manifest:

*Beauty without Being could not be, nor Being voided of Beauty: abandoned by Beauty. The very figment of Being needs some imposed image of Beauty to make it passable, and even to ensure its existence; it exists to the degree in which it has taken some share in the beauty of the Idea; and the more deeply it has drawn on this, the less imperfect it is, precisely because the nature which is essentially beautiful has entered into it the more intimately. (V.8.ix)*

The logical parameters of creativity establish the most fundamental metaphysical necessity, the constitution of the Being of beings. Beings exist only to the degree in which they have taken some share in their transcendent forms or archetypes. There remains but only one way for the ultimate truth of art to show itself.

*All things must exist in something else; of that prior – since there is no obstacle, all being continuous within the realm of reality – there has suddenly appeared a sign, an image, whether given forth directly or through the ministry of soul or of some phase of the soul matters nothing for the moment: thus the entire aggregate of existence springs from the divine world, in greater beauty There because There unmingled, but mingled here. (V.8.vii,viii,x)*

This then is Art, "entire and omnipresent as an entirety", none of its parts lacking in symbolic meaning.

## **SYMBOL OR SIGN**

It is the sudden appearance of a special kind of sign that now engages our attention. *Theos* has made itself manifest as something "wholly other" from the profane world in which it presents itself. It is for this reason that we adopt the term *hierophany* as the descriptive image of that which answers the demands of Plotinian synthesis, one that is symbolic in a double sense: Being of that natural reality it perfects and of that transcendent realm it represents. Our

concentration turns to the appearance of a particularly exquisite kind of image or sign, the hierophany.

To designate the act of manifestation of the sacred, we have proposed the term *hierophany*. It is a fitting term, because it does not imply anything further; it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, that *something sacred shows itself to us*.<sup>66</sup>

The hierophany is an "event" that involves no further specification. The sacred appears in an object that is part of our profane existential sphere. The hierophany makes immanent something "wholly other" and so "wholly different" from the natural world that we are "wholly taken" with its appearance. The first possible definition of the sacred is its opposition to the profane. The hierophany issues from a transcendent reality of an entirely different order than the existences of this world.

The work of art presents us with wonder, a visible manifestation of a wholly different divine order. By making visible that which is transcendent to our world, the sacred allows the work of art to become something else. The concrete reality of the hierophany images itself as a theological idea, that of immanent *theos*. The coalescence of the aesthetic with the religious sanctifies the All of Existence, where the art of being human becomes its final demonstration.

The sacred manifests itself as a power or force that is quite different from the powerful forces of both Nature and Art. In so saying, the appearance of the divine in the hierophany does not deny its profane existence as a beautiful work of art, valued by the art connoisseur and collector. By appearing in a particular thing the sacred ceases to be absolute and unconditioned. Whenever the sacred shows itself as the object of our contemplation in this manner it limits itself, just as other beings and things are limited.

The appearance of *theos* forms the vital part of the Plotinian dialectic for it actuates hidden possibilities hitherto not thought. These characteristic structures of manifestation and limitation are at the centre of Plotinian metaphysics of participation. A hierophany reveals the power of the Holy to our



purview. The appearance of the sacred becomes the key to understanding the religious attitude that Plotinus brings to theory of art.

The images that art presents are signs for something else, but not every sign has meaning. Symbolically, signs do not necessarily express anything meaningful at all unless they fulfil a "significative" as well as an "indicative" function. Of the two concepts connected with the work of art, I will deal first with that of indication.

We note that for a work of art to possess meaning there is no necessary way for it to act as a sign, for instance, indicating some objective thing or object. The relation that obtains here we simply call the indicative relation. Images of meaning function meaningfully even in isolated mental life, where they no longer serve to indicate anything at all.<sup>67</sup> The presentation of hierophany has a double denotation. The first indicates something transcendent to our apprehension. The second attaches to the natural world in which it appears. We now recognize the implicit dual intention that the hierophany records, the sacred and the profane. It is this fundamental integrative synthesis that the work of art makes possible.

These distinctive "acts of presence" enable us to propose the Plotinian work of art as a rarefied kind of symbol that indeed renders visible its transcendental source. Plotinus establishes the work of art as a special type of sign, one that presents itself as "pure icon", bearer of ultimate meaning.<sup>68</sup> The hierophany or pure icon is understood as "revelation", and makes the work of art a symbol transcendently perceived. In the Plotinian art object thus assimilated, we understand the hierophany as a representative *eikōn* of its transcendental object, the meaning of Art itself.

What Plotinus lays bare is the fundamental distinction between signifying and representation, for we intuitively choose the hierophany over the mere sign as being the more authentic signification of the *theos* ground that lends mystery to its appearance. The work of art clarifies for us its "consciousness form" as the synthesis of an objectifying fulfilment, a conscious content of the

sacred object in perception and the profane work of art perceptually intended. The same appearance of "own" with "other" as "presence in coincidence" describes both its subjective reference and the specific unity of its objective ground. The sudden appearance of *theos* in a work of art is a concrete perceptual occurrence, for it establishes the final meaning of its production.

We find in the work of art a passively constructed structure or form, that of the sensible on the one hand and the ideal on the other. Through its presence we find the constitution of "conceptual unity" but not of "specific identity". We are witness to a "relation of coincidence" by virtue of their identical place in the very world that the work of art establishes. The work of art becomes a representation of its transcendental object, animated in that particular *liminal* or "threshold experience" of its sudden appearance.<sup>69</sup> This very special type of object is both self-warranting and self-legitimizing. By appropriating this way of being for ourselves we acknowledge this self-warranting feature as its intrinsic value.

Again, "the clear eyed hold the vision within". There are some that would look upon the hierophany as something beyond them, at best seen as an object caught by a direction of the will. This is unfortunate.

*All that one sees as a spectacle is still external; one must bring the vision within and see no longer in that mode of separation but as we know ourselves. (V.8.x)*

Our experience of the hierophany brings the *theos* into consciousness and at once we see an image of the Ideal Archetype. Further, to release the self from that image of God as "other" is to move into an authentic self-identity as "own", where no such separation exists. Plotinus has said it would not be easy. We form a specific unity or coincidence with the Sanctuary of Art silently present within. There can be no knowledge of art unless it is in the sense of appropriation, affinity and identity with its object.

## METAPHYSICS OF PARTICIPATION

Careful reading of Plotinus soon recognizes that the One recedes in favour of the term "appropriation", a figure of speech that has regained philosophical significance in modern hermeneutical applications. Plotinus struggles with a term that is simply too laden with metaphysical connotations. The issue here is that he retains the term One in order to maintain the relational features of his formulation of the three *hypostases*. In other words, Plotinus is always seeking a way out of traditional theory of art. He seeks to retrieve a way of thinking integral to the ancient myths, a feature he always retains.

For its part, the term appropriation does not designate a fact of occurrence as does, for example, Being of beings, but rather a relation between existence and being, appropriated one to the other. The relation between human being, the everyday world, the One and Art is more fundamental than that which is merely related. Plotinian theory of art offers an analysis of the forms or structures of occurrence. We are reminded that the transcendental idea that Art presents cannot and does not appear in any real sense. What does appear is a kind of withholding, perhaps in the sense of its ultimate truth or *alētheia*, an uncovering that yields what is hidden only in reciprocal ownership.

The appearance of *theos* replaces the finite now. It succeeds in substituting a true dimensionality of the One, in contradistinction to the now of its occurrence. Plotinus describes the hierophany without reference to some positive thing occurring. The occurrence of art engages an *ur-passiv* movement and the beauty of God appropriated each to the other. It is for this reason that the term appropriation and One almost coalesce, without simply collapsing into an undifferentiated sameness.

The telling use that Plotinus makes of the mythopoetic image is best exemplified in the reference he brings to Nature as the "dance-play" of the "living whole". (IV.4.xxxiii) The almost palpable kinetic energy that animates this image is very apt. We find a theory of art that concentrates almost entirely upon its integrative function, culminating in a concept of an organic and

naturally occurring whole. The work of art is representative of a structure or form wherein every detail of its composition is intimately related to every other. We are provided with a purposiveness or integral *telos* that is referenced throughout the Plotinian enterprise. Nevertheless, we should remember that the work of art does not seek some goal derived from its external making.

Below the beauty of art is the incomplete beauty of material substance, which art is able to perfect. The work of art stands midway between the beauty of Nature which it ennobles and brings to fulfilment, and its cosmogonic Source which can be known through dialectical ascent. The fundamental departure for this new approach to theory of art is a rethinking of the question of the meaning of the being of art, a rethinking that departs from all preconceptions. Plotinus returns both the perceiver and the producer of beauty to the concrete data of art itself.

### DWELLING WITH OTHERS

Art is the window through which authentic human existence establishes itself, a creative achievement in the midst of what is, an existential adventure through which ultimate meaning reveals itself as the clearing of an openness in disposition that wills "more strongly". Revealing the Being of beings to both perceiver and producer, the work of art affords us a comprehensive way of seeing things. Because philosophy is reflection, it must wait for art to produce a consciousness of specific unity before it is able to grasp the totality experience that art provides. It is, therefore, not too far to suggest that theory of art is the general *organon* or "first instrument" of Plotinian metaphysics.

By its own indwelling act, the work of art stands out as a created entity. Because authentic understanding establishes itself through the work of art, its truth stands in a cosmogonic way. The work of art is indeed a very special type of occurrence. It throws a new and extraordinary light on things as it changes everything familiar into something "more real". It opens to a new way of thinking and being in the world and therefore has the historical function of

revealing to humankind the *ethos* entrusted to them in the fulfilment of their human destiny as individuals and collectively as a culture.

The work of art offers the self-perceiving individual a way into an indwelling Transcendent Function capable of opening the understanding to an identity of the "self" and its "ideal archetype". This psychological act mediates the appearance of the sacred in our profane world, and expresses its symbolic bearing. It facilitates a transition from one psychological attitude or condition to another. In that art is a symbolic representation of a level of reality that cannot be reached in any other way, it opens a realm otherwise closed to us. The work of art reveals dimensions and elements of the self that correspond to the dimensions and elements of a participating transcendence. Plotinus shows us that the spiritual way of dwelling in the world is more than an organization of human feelings and attitudes. It involves reference to a reality outside itself, a reference that is validated by our participation in it.

Plotinian theory of art is magisterial in its simplicity. Art is the image of the Transcendent Faculty or "creative unconscious" and represents a fundamental link between the concrete and the imagined, the formed and the unformed. It bridges the abyss between primal difference.

*Thus the Primals [the first "Categories"] are seen to be: Intellectual-Principle; Existence; Difference; [and] Identity. Such difference there must be if there is to be any intellection: but similarly there must also be identity [since, in perfect knowing, subject and object are identical]. (V.1.iv)*

Standing in compensatory relationship to both "identity" and "difference", art enables thesis and antithesis to encounter one another on equal terms. Plotinus demonstrates that the instrument which is capable of uniting these two opposites is Art itself, neither adhering to nor partaking of the one or the other, but somehow "mysteriously common" to both, offering the possibility of a new synthesis.

According to Porphyry, the ecstatic achievement of *gnosis* was attained by Plotinus but "four times, during the period I spent with him".<sup>70</sup> The achievements of Art are "sudden" and is not something that lingers. The

*Mysteries* are not to be treated lightly. If we endure, we return to partake in the benevolent unfolding of creation with others. The symbolic power of art facilitates our existential encounter with "other" as "own", for it encapsulates the *Lenenswelt* of a very real occurrence. Its nature is paradoxical, for it provides a perspective out of which a synthesis of all opposing possibilities can be made.

The holy nature of the work of art is neither an alternative point of view nor a compensatory relationship. It opens our attention to another world which, if appropriately assimilated, adds to the existential quality of both the individual and the culture in which he abides. The work of art is a numinous statement, a symbolic portrait of Ultimate Meaning. We have discovered that a "more resolute" opening of the will to the transcendent power of the *numen* is the prerequisite "clearing" necessary to our assimilation of the *numinosum* itself. The Holy cannot be conquered. We can only open ourselves to it. Experience of the *numinosum* is even more than the *tremendum* of the totality of its presentation.<sup>71</sup> It is our confrontation with a transcendent omnipresent power, one that implies a meaningful if not purposive encounter that establishes our identity in concordance with others.

Even if we find ourselves, so to speak, thrown into a world not of our making, we still possess the freedom to choose the relational feature in our existential encounter. Plotinian theory of art centres in the use of this freedom. Hence, we acknowledge a movement in our path, from the unity of the world as our "outer concentration" to the self-warranting aspect of an awareness that is our "inner concentration".<sup>72</sup> All dualities and oppositions have been overcome by the synthesizing power of Art, the self-identity of self-reflective thought. Plotinus has effectively demonstrated that it is to this specific unity that all orders of creativity aspire.

We have discovered the work of art to be a symbol of the higher realm to which all human endeavour is related, and upon which all individual experience of human production depends. Art is an objective demonstration of the truth of

its dual intention, of that higher reality which it mirrors and that lower reality which it perfects.<sup>73</sup> It reflects the unconditional demand made by our ultimate concern, and promises "ultimate fulfilment".<sup>74</sup>

One of the things that is alleged to be the purpose of art is its cognitive function, art as a means to the acquisition of truth. For this reason art may be called the pathway to the highest knowledge, impossible to attain by other means. To say that art manifests truth is one thing, to say that it is morally good and has the capacity to influence human beings and make them morally better is another. Although the two kinds of judgements differ in kind, they are not entirely unrelated. The question of the meaning of the being of art is one that has long been neglected. Authentic thinking on the subject of art consists in a constant revision and clarification of the basic ideas and concepts from which all theory of art sets out.

If one wishes to be admitted to the presence of art, that is, as messenger, one must engage it as a whole.<sup>75</sup> The total composition that enables a relationship between producer and perceiver, the work of art as "informing presence", and Art itself, makes a statement that we must not lose. We look for a theme, a *leitmotiv* to which everything relates. We learn as much about the subject and the object of our attention as we can. Guided by the formal structures of the whole we then begin to recognize the principal features of the work and explore their domain over dependent details. The entire wealth of the work of art soon unveils itself and falls into place, and as we perceive it, perhaps with a certain empathy, it begins to engage all the powers of mind with its message. We turn, therefore, towards new proposals of a theory of art that releases names and things from their perceived and conceived associations, a creative synthesis that recognizes them and their contents as representations to our faculty of that which has not as yet been thought.

The basic concepts of Plotinian theory of art include ideas such as differentiation, identity, recovery, and the gathering of oppositions into an appropriation of a reciprocal ownership. We have found that art is the

development of a life-affirming response, a process through which we discover both objective models and productive resolutions. Art provides practical paradigms for culture and its institutions, what has been designated the "deep solutions" so essential to a new way of being in the world.<sup>76</sup>

Art is an idea in the abstract only in the sense that it belongs to a way of thinking that attempts to go to the source of human experience. The intellectual abstractions that art engage belongs only to its ideal form. Art is perhaps the most concrete of the ideas, because it includes within it a unity of all categorical oppositions. Art is not singularly abstract, but collectively comprehensive. Art is true concreteness. We must learn to think in this way if we are to avoid succumbing to the slumber of conceptual abstractions and the utter nihilism of practising their regulation. Art is letting something be where there was nothing at all. It is the primordial urge to be with other as with self or own.

Plotinus stresses a relational view of art and creativity. The key psychological concept has been appropriation, an act that gathers into a mutual belonging and identity.<sup>77</sup> Our appropriation of the transcendental object of art is an act of making something of the transcendent ground from which we begin and end.

## SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Convinced that the culture of his civilization was disintegrating, Plotinus seeks to demonstrate its enduring truth by reintegrating the basic assumptions of human experience in a way that mirrors the *ethos* of a golden age. The gods of an ancient learning are recollected to the Ideal Archetype or Authentic Self through the operations of a Transcendent Function found within. Plotinus expands the accepted tenets of theory of art to include the epistemological ingredients of *mythopoietic* understanding. He shows that we cannot find the true source of art on the side of the work of art alone, that is to say, as an object or thing, because the objects of art and the intellectual world they compose cannot have independent existence. The essence of things resides in



their relation to the archetypal existents for whom they are objects. Plotinus uncovers the First Act upon which our human being depends. From an innovative description of this sanctified "making" flows his existential or "religious" approach to theory of art, yielding positive paradigms for our more modern human predicament.<sup>78</sup>

The event of participation is an eternal act, one that establishes our relation with others. It confirms the spiritual validity of "own" as with "other". In spite of this direct and continuous dependence of the individual on a transcendent source, human freedom is effectively safeguarded by the divine freedom integral to the soul. Indeed, from a psychological point of view, participation effectively safeguards our pursuit of the ideal. To choose the Upward Way recognizes the absolute freedom of the Ideal Archetype.

Our effort in life is meant to rediscover the way of the *uni*ate, which has its prototype in the reservoir of Being itself. The natural world is the interval that separates the unconditioned act of *theos* from the conditioned act of human participation. The authentic human endeavour of the visual artist is so intended to communicate the creative act of participation to others which, in turn, propagates itself again in the life of human culture.<sup>79</sup>

When Plotinus unveils the *ethos* inherent in his theory of art we are introduced to the unusual meaning he brings to familiar existential themes, such as freedom and human destiny. Freedom is at the centre of a self that chooses to participate in the absolute freedom of creativity. Human freedom originates in this process, for it is this conversion of a misconceived determinism into freedom that is the real vehicle of participation.

Plotinus is more than the dialectical aesthetics he advances. His ultimate concern is to make available to a fading civilization the sanctified way of *gnosis*. In so doing, Plotinus rehabilitates the existential everyday, seeing even in the least significant instant an opportunity of consent to the self-creative effort. There is but one way to experience creativity in art, namely to practice it in the truth of its authentic being, and this means doing it steadily, everyday. In

the largest sense, life itself is seen as the creative act, so that one's self finally emerges as the true object of art.

### **PLOTINIANISM AS STYLE**

There can be no doubt about the disposition that I have brought to the work presented herein. I am a painter, a visual artist. Plotinus has taught me that aesthetics is theology and mythology is theory of art. Our search for the meaning of art from within the more secular confines of aesthetics has rewarded us with a theology of art which confirms a fundamental relationship between art and human understanding. This has been my guiding motivation from the very beginning. In so saying, I have remained within the unity of a single problem, the question of the meaning of art.

We should not be too quick to dismiss Plotinus as a mystic. He is a man very much in the world in which he dwells. He is of course theoretical, perhaps even speculative in his approach. Notwithstanding, Plotinus directs the more important practical aspects of his theory of art to the visual artist, not the philosopher of aesthetics. Traditional aesthetics have, so to speak, been overturned. The power of art holds constant in the imagination of its maker, not in the rhetoric of its discursive formulations.

The biggest problem that remains is the question of art itself. Seen in this light his lecture on "Why Distant Objects Appear Small" (II.8) is practical advise, especially for the painter. Plotinus is more than theory. The unexpected consequence of his theory of art is the discovery of a studio program for the painter. Plotinus seeks after that which makes ultimate meaning visible to human understanding. Art serves this *telos* or final purpose. He offers a viable alternative to studio instruction that is based on the discursive demonstrations of "aesthetics of the sensible". Plotinus advances a studio program that transcends the facts of this world, one that engages "aesthetics of the spirit". It is new in an ancient sort of way, unlike any studio program extant today of which I am aware.

We should note that Plotinianism is indeed practiced to this day. Its demonstration remains rather secluded in the more sanctified inner reaches of Christian Orthodoxy. The theory of art that gives substance to aesthetics of the *eikōn* is found in monastic studios generally adjacent to the *scriptorium* and library.<sup>80</sup> In the case of painting, which is most responsive to his ideas, Plotinus worked out this program in reasonable detail. The most important points embrace the following tenets.<sup>81</sup> Imperfection must be avoided. All that is the result of the sense of sight is not the subject of art. Diminution of size and the fading of colour, which is the consequence of seeing things from a distance, are "measures of falsification" not considered important.

Art is a disclosure of mind. Space is delusion. True distance can exist only within the nearest facing plane; true size is the dimension of each form within that plane. Deformation through perspective and alterations in the appearance of things, for example, produced by light and shade, are to be dismissed as false. Things are shown as the perceiver sees them close at hand, all in the foreground, in the same full light without shadow. The subject matter of the painting is rendered with all the details clear, for God is in the details. The argument is extended to colour. If the colour of an object fades in distance, this effaced, degraded colour is not "true". The truth of colour must be an even saturation in the proximate plane.

According to Plotinianism, matter is darkness and spirit is light. In order to reach beyond matter to spirit, painting should not develop the depth that shadows hold and represent only the luminous aspect of things. Shadows are to be shunned for doing violence to truthful colour, for there can be neither truth nor reality where there is no "illumination". All space is substance, shadow or darkness without light. The light that illumines matter is the light that irradiates substance from within its matrix. Plotinus speaks with the voice of an instructor in painting:

*Seen from a distance, objects appear reduced and close together, however far apart they be. As we are placed farther and farther away from the material mass under observation, it is more and more the bare form that reaches us, stripped, so to speak, of magnitude as of all other quality.*

*With an object at hand we know how much space is covered by the colour; at a distance, only that something is coloured. Still the colours seen from a distance are faint; but they are not small as the masses are.*

*True; there is [also] the common fact of diminution. There is colour with its diminution, faintness; there is magnitude with its diminution, smallness; and magnitude follows colour diminishing stage by stage with it.*

*But, the phenomenon is more easily explained by the example of things of wide variety [as in Nature]. The total appears the less in proportion to the detail which has escaped the eye; observe each single point and then you can estimate the volume precisely.*

*Again, magnitudes of one colour and unbroken form trick the sense of quantity: the vision can no longer estimate by the particular; it slips away, not finding the standby of the difference between part and part.*

*Because the eye does not pass from stage by stage through the stretch of intervening space so as to note its forms, therefore it cannot report the multitude of that space. (II.8.i)*

The image of artificer as trickster is noteworthy. The type of painting that logically follows from Plotinianism flourished in his time. Excavations at Dura-Europos have discovered that the Plotinian style in painting existed as early as the first century C.E. The term Plotinianism is generally associated with a particular way of doing philosophy. Plotinianism also describes a particular way of doing art.

In representing objects, the Plotinian style in painting seeks to eliminate the spectator together with the incidental effects the painted panel may offer, so that the image reveals only its permanent features. Each object is represented in its true size, colour and shape, in a uniform full light upon a two dimensional plane without perspective. The object so depicted has no contact with the surroundings in which it finds itself. It is suspended in the ethereal air of Anaximenes. This application on a two-dimensional ground creates disappearance of depth. Figures lose their mass and weight, colour their saturation and tone. While painting represents real things, its purpose is not to

reproduce the character of our everyday world. Art is meant to render "spiritualized matter", and make visible the light of the "sur-real" truth that constitutes its mysterious existence.<sup>82</sup> Further to this intellectual abstraction, natural figurative forms were replaced by schematic drawing, images of organic generation by geometric production.

The implications that Plotinian theory of art has for colour theory, composition, theory of form, drawing, painting and theory of creativity are enduring messages to the painter and teacher of the visual arts alike. The tenets of *Plotinianism* are as instructive as the principles of *Abstract Expressionism* promoted by Kasimir Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky, the doctrines of *Surrealism* found in André Breton and the rules of *Pointillism* advanced by Paul Signac.<sup>83</sup> Our work in the studio enters into a dialogue not so much initiated by the making of art, but by the spirit of creation in which we participate. Meditating on the beauty of creativity is yet another form of the Plotinian vision.<sup>84</sup>



## NOTES

The standard method for citation of the Plotinian *corpus* designates the number of the *Ennead* first by Roman Numeral and the *Tractate* second, by Arabic Numeral, with the chapter number by Roman Numeral lower case. "So it is with individual souls". (IV.8.iv)

Quotations from the *Enneads* refer to the translation by Stephen MacKenna, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, London: The Medici Society Edition, 1917. See also Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page, Rev. 3rd. ed., London: Faber and Faber, 1962. Thesis citations refer to the Stephen MacKenna translation. For a comparative translation see A.H. Armstrong, *Enneads*, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966.

My greatest debt is to Stephen MacKenna. His original translations, together with his commentaries, are classics in the field. See also William R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 2 Vols., London: Lindsey Press, 1914, and A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*, London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1953. These works are acknowledged as authoritative.

References to Plato are from Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, Bollingen Series LXXI, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961.

For definitive statements on the language of aesthetics I have turned to Vladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, the great Polish historian. See his *History of Aesthetics*, 3 Vols, PWN—Polish Scientific Publishers: Warszawa, 1970. I cannot stress enough what my narrative owes to the works of Stephen MacKenna and Vladyslaw Tatarkiewicz.

1 *nootherapia*, from the Greek *nous*, "mind", and *therapeia*, "healing" or "service". With respect to the contents of this study, *nootherapia* will be seen as synonymous and consistent with "conversion of consciousness", an entirely changed human awareness.

2 Plato writes:

Now, we know that the most hostile elements are the opposites – hot and cold, sweet and sour, wet and dry, and so on – and if, as I do myself, we are to believe these poets of ours, it was his skill in imposing love and concord upon those opposites that enabled our illustrious progenitor Aesculapius to found the science of medicine. (*Symposium*, 186d)

"Aesculapius, the God of Medical Art. In Homer he is not a divinity, but simply the blameless physician. He not only cured the sick, but recalled the dead to life. On request of Apollo, Zeus placed him among the stars."

Thomas Bulfinch, *The Age of Fable or Beauties of Mythology*, Toronto: Musson Book Co., 1898, pp. 462-463. It is interesting that Bulfinch refers to the divine persons of ancient Greek mythology as "beauties".

- 3 Excavations of the sacred precinct at Epidauros reveal that it contained temples to Aesculapius and Artemis, twin sister of Apollo, a theatre, a stadium, gymnasiums, baths, a hospital, a *thelos* or "beehive-hut", and an *abaton*, an area where patients slept. For a general overview of the main features of Greek civilization, see Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1960. See also A. Boma, *Greek Civilization*, New York: Macmillan Co., 1961.
- 4 For a discussion of the relationship between art and poetry, see R. W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poiesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting", in *Art Bulletin*, 22 (1940), pp. 197-269. See also John Graham, "Ut Pictura Poiesis", in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 4 Vols., ed. Philip Wiener, New York: Scribner, 1974. Vol. IV, pp. 465-476.
- 5 Cf., Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, Bollingen Series LXXI, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961, pp. 1253-1254.
- 6 The classic account of the historical applications of iconography and iconology is found in Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art", in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955, pp. 26-41. See also *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, trans. Joseph Peake, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968.  
The article by J. Bialostocki, "Iconography", in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. P. Wiener, New York: C. Scribner, 1973, Vol. 2, pp. 524-542, is the best article about iconography and iconology in general. A scholarly Christian approach is found in Roel van Straten, *An Introduction to Iconography: Symbols, Allusions and Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1994.
- 7 See Longinus, *On The Sublime*, trans. with Commentary, James A. Arieti and John M. Grossett, New York: E. Mellen Press, 1985. See also Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. J.T. Boulton, London: Routledge and Paul, 1958.
- 8 See Paul Crawford, *The Kantian Sublime*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. See also Donald Crawford, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory*, Wisconsin: Madison University Press, 1974.
- 9 See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of The Holy: An inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. J.W. Harvey, London: Oxford University Press, 1926.

- 10 Paul Tillich offers a theological inquiry into the various elements that attach to our experience of art. See his "Existential Aspects of Modern Art", in *Christianity and the Existentialists*, ed. Carl Michalson, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956, pp. 128-147.
- 11 Werner Jaeger, "Paideia", in Joseph Katz, *Plotinus' Search For The Good*, New York: Columbia University King's Crown Press, 1950, p.15.
- 12 A good introduction to the Hellenistic philosophy that preceded Plotinus is in R.W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy*, New York: Routledge, 1996. See also Anthony A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1974, and Newman Shapiro and Edwin M. Curley, eds. *Hellenistic Philosophy: Selected Readings in Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism and Neoplatonism*, New York: Modern Library, 1965.
- 13 A descriptive phenomenology of the "attitudes" we bring to philosophy is provided by Eduard Spranger, *Types of Men: The Psychology and Ethics of Personality*, trans. Paul J.W. Pigors, Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1928. Spranger systemizes Wilhelm Dilthey and rewards us with a topology of the various attitudes or ways of being in the world. Following the "ideal types" advanced by Max Weber, he distinguished the *Lebenswelt* or "forms of life", i.e., possible ways of being in the world, as "theoretical", "economic", "aesthetic", "social", "political" and "religious".
- 14 For a brief introduction to ideas concomitant with the terms *logos* and *nous* see G.B. Kerford, "Logos" and *Nous*" in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, New York: Macmillan & The Free Press, 1967, Vol. 5, pp. 83-84; p. 525. See also David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria*, Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985; Robert M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1984, and A.H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1940.

The term *nous* is from the Greek meaning "mind" or "reason". Anaxagoras invokes the idea of *nous* as a principle both of order and of animation, accounting for the presence of a *cosmos* rather than *chaos*. Although Plato used the term *nous* to refer to the faculty of highest knowledge, it was Aristotle who formalized the point distinguishing between *nous poetikos*, or "active reason", and the *nous pathetikos*, or "passive reason". The two complement each other as do matter and form. Aristotle applied the term *nous* to "divine intelligence", whose activity he described as *noesis noeseos*, "thought thinking itself".

See J.E. Raven, "The Basis of Anaxagoras' Cosmology", in *Classical Quarterly*, 48, (1954), pp. 123-137, and R. Mathewson, "Aristotle and Anaxagoras", in *Classical Quarterly*, 52, (1958), pp. 67-81.



The term *logos* is from the Greek noun derived from the root found in the verb *lego*, "I say"; meaning "reason", "principle", "speech", "word", "discourse", or *ratio*. The function of the term in philosophy has turned largely on the *logos* as "reason principle". Heraclitus was the first to formulate a *logos* doctrine. For Heraclitus, the term *logos* combined three ideas: a) Human thought about the universe, b) Rational structure or form of the universe, and c) The source of that rational structure. See W.R. Inge, "Logos" in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 13 Vols., ed. James Hastings, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908-1926, Vol. III, pp. 133-138. See also R.E. Witt, "The Plotinian Logos and its Stoic Basis" in *Classical Quarterly*, 25, (1931), pp. 103-111.

- 15 Plotinus borrowed insights from Hermes Trismegistus, Homer, Hesiod, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, Orphism and the Stoics. Special attention was given to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. For a guide to Plotinian references, see Stephen MacKenna, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, Appendix III, "Index of Platonic References", pp. 630-635.
- 16 The Plotinian project issues from a profound existential concern for both the individual and the collective. While the present study will enter into Plotinian psychology of the soul, the full extent of his integrative psychology as it relates to the more orthodox tenets of modern phenomenological existentialism advanced by Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Binswagner remains outside the scope of this paper.
- 17 For an introduction to Pythagoras see W.K.C. Guthrie, "Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism", in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, pp. 37-39. See also his more comprehensive "Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans", in Vol. 1, *History of Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1962, pp. 146-340.
- 18 See Walter Scott, ed. *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious or Philosophical Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924/1936. See also *The Corpus Hermeticum* and *The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asculapius*, in *The Way Of Hermes*, Preface by Gilles Guispel, London: Gerald Duckworth, 1999.
- 19 See E.R. Dodds, "The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One", in *Classical Quarterly*, 22, (1928). See also Robert S. Brumbaugh, *Plato On The One: The Hypotheses in the Parmenides*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961; Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992; Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides' Way of Truth and Plato's Parmenides*, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1939, and Constance C. Meinwald, *Plato's Parmenides*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

- 20 See Andreas Graeser, *Plotinus and The Stoics: A Preliminary Study*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972. See also Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985; F.H. Sandbach, *The Stoics*, London: Duckworth, 1994; Keith Campbell, *A Stoic Philosophy of Life*, Lanham, MO: University Press of America, 1986, and John M. Rist, *The Stoics*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1978.
- 21 See W.D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951, and J.A. Stewart, *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
- 22 See R.E. Witt, "The Plotinian Logos and its Stoic Basis", in *Classical Quarterly*, 25, (1931).
- 23 See Philip Merlan, "Plotinus", in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 6, pp. 351-352.
- 24 For an account of the historical Plotinus, see Porphyry, "On The Life of Plotinus and The Arrangement of His Work", in Stephen MacKenna, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, pp. cii-cxxv.
- 25 This brief sketch follows Stephen MacKenna, "Plotinus: An Introduction", in *Plotinus: The Enneads*, pp. lxxxiv-lxxxix, and Will Durant, "Plotinus", Vol. 3, *The Story of Civilization*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944, pp. 607-611.
- 26 Porphyry has provided us with two arrangements of the fifty-four lectures or *tractates*. The first arrangement may be called "chronological". The second "systematic" arrangement is arbitrarily arranged to "assigned matter of one general nature". See Stephen MacKenna, "Concordance of the Systematic and Chronological Orders of the *Tractates*", in Appendix I, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, pp. 550-551.
- 27 "If the influence of Plotinus on the Christian mysticism of the West and the East was incalculable, it remains true nevertheless that the principal and specific source of Christian mysticism is the Biblical revelation." Paul Henry, "Plotinus' Place in the History of Thought", in Stephen MacKenna, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, p. li.
- 28 Stephen MacKenna, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, p. xxiii.
- 29 Plotinus advances on Aristotle's discussion of "sufficient source" and "unity of parts", in *Categories*, Vol. 1, *The Loeb Classical Library*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983, pp. 12-109.
- 30 Plotinian emanationism is opposed to evolutionism. Evolution is a temporal event in which the First Principle itself is involved or immanent, and in which an increase in perfection is usually conceived.

His theory of emanationism is also opposed to creationism, according to which the divine First Principle creates a universe from which it differs absolutely. In so doing, Deity creates a universe either out of nothing or by giving intelligent structure to an already existing *chaos*.

- 31 This Plotinian portrait may be described as "dynamic pantheism" to distinguish it from an "immanent pantheism". See Robert Ranulph Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, Rev. 2nd ed., London: Methuen & Co., 1914. Marett is known for the theory of dynamism he brings to theological anthropology. From within the context of cosmogony Marett goes beyond Edward Tylor's theory of "animism" and James Frazer's theory of "magic". See Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art, and custom*, 2 Vols., London: Murray, 1891, and James George Frazer, *Magic and Religion*, 3rd. rev. ed., London: Watts, 1944.

Marett argues that the "religious" attitude finds its source in the sense of awe we feel when faced with a transcendent power that is experienced rather than thought about and reasoned. He influenced anthropological theory and also the work of Rudolf Otto.

The term "immanence" is used to signify principles and/or acts, and in theological doctrines, a concept that establishes the relation between human beings and their gods. This dynamic world-view asserts the existence of an eternal power in things not reducible to matter in motion. We note here the last visages of an atomic mechanism.

Mechanical explanation is the principle used by most materialistic systems of thought, and not easily separated from such systems. Materialism is any set of doctrines stressing the primacy of matter over spiritual factors in metaphysics, value theory, epistemology, and historical explanation. The Pre-Socratic philosophers were hylozoistic. The term "hylozoism" is from the Greek *hyle*, "vital matter". Thales, Heraclitus and Anaxagoras shared this conception. Although the identity between ruling principle and ontological unit is not fully developed, their position may be termed "hylozoistic pantheism".

- 32 See Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, New York: Harper & Row, 1960.
- 33 See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974. See also Joan Stambaugh, *Nietzsche's Thought of Eternal Return*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972, and Martin Heidegger, *The Eternal Recurrence of The Same*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979.

- 34 We are reminded of the "natural way" of Lao Tzu:

*The Tao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal Tao;  
the name that can be named is not the eternal name.*

*The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;  
the Named is the mother of all things.*

*Tao Te-Ching, Ch.1.*

See Wing-Tsit Chan, "Tao-Te Ching", in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 139.

- 35 The Pre-Socratic conception of the *psyche* is an image of the "breath of life" associated with the essential "governing principle" of all living things. The *psyche* or soul was viewed by Socrates as the locus of personality and intelligence, the tending and strengthening of which is our chief business in life.

The conception of the *psyche* as immortal was brought to definitive statement in Plato by way of Socrates. Since such a conception of *psyche* is usually termed soul, a translation of the Latin *anima*, Plato's conception is generally treated under the term "soul".

Since Aristotle's treatise on the *psyche* is usually rendered in Latin translation as *De Anima*, it is customary to speak of Aristotle's doctrine of the soul rather than *psyche*. Aristotle held the *psyche* to be the form of the body, distinguishing in the soul both rational and irrational operations, making a tripartite distinction between vegetable, animal, and human. Aristotle followed Plato in providing a tripartite conception of *psyche* as reason, will, and appetite. See J. Burnet, "The Socratic Doctrine of the Soul", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 7, (1915-1916), pp. 235-259.

With regard to the soul, it may be said that Plotinus began where Plato left off. Plotinian psychology of the soul is much more direct and extended than Plato's mythical framework. In Plato, as in Aristotle, *psyche* or soul was never reconciled with its Ideal Archetype as metaphysical principle. It was the Stoics who first conceived of individual souls or *logoi spermatikoi*, as parts of the universal *logos spermatikos*, "seminal reason", the "active principle" of the soul. Plotinus is always motivated by his concern for the individual. His integrative psychology of the soul is described in *On The Essence of Soul*. (IV.1)

- 36 Plotinus follows Parmenides. See E.R. Dodds, "The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One", in *Classical Quarterly*, 22, (1928), pp. 129-142. Since thought and being are identical, one need only follow the principle of consistency to gain the truth about ultimate reality. If being is, and non-being is not, being cannot come from non-being. Hence, being is eternal.

The term "non-being" has as its synonyms the terms "not-being" and "nothing" and is the antonym of the word "being". See also P.L. Heath, "Nothing", *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 5, pp. 524-525.

- 37 The analysis of light through much of the history of philosophy has stressed the physical or sensible properties of illumination. Plotinus treats light in a different way. It is an emanation of the Divine Mind, containing both physical *and* spiritual aspects of illumination. (I.6.iii)

The English philosopher Robert Grosseteste (1168-1252), the first to elaborate a comprehensive metaphysics of light, holds light to be the First Principle of the physical universe, where light provides "intelligibility" to *cosmos*. See L.E. Lynch, "The Doctrine of Divine Ideas and Illumination in Robert Grosseteste", in *Mediaeval Studies*, 3, (1941), pp. 161-173.

- 38 Cf., Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923-29, Vol. II, p. 38.

F.W.J. Schelling also holds that the *mythos* of art is authentically understood within its own "authentic necessity", laws and reality. See Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, ed. trans. Douglas W. Stott, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Myth takes hold of the "creative potential" found in the sign system of language itself. José Huertas-Jourda refers to the grammar of myth as "tautegorical" in "Towards the Genetic Phenomenology of Intrinsic Worth", *University of Colorado Papers* (1989), Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1989. "I borrow this term from E. Cassirer, by way of G.S. Kirk; in a discussion of various theories concerning myth Kirk is led to remark: Myth is not intellectual, according to Cassirer; it is tautegorical, not allegorical – the "image" does not represent the "thing"; it *is* the thing. [Note 17, PSF, 38. (E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. by Ralf Mannheim, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923-29, Vol. 2, p. 38.)] Myth belongs to the sphere of affectivity and will. Etymologically this term is contrasted to *egorein* (public speaking in the market place), and to *kategorein* (to accuse, or to characterize according to public speech). In contradistinction to both these terms which are clearly subject to the grammar of the predicative 'is', tautegorical or *tautegorein* clearly means self-characterizing, self-revealing or self-accusatory, thus emphasizing the very self-giving of being as truth as recognized by [Edmund] Husserl". (José Huertas-Jourda, *ibid.*, n. 25, p. 16)

- 39 Anthropological accounts of so-called primitive or pagan cultures that have fallen into a lifeless void subsequent to the destruction of their *mythos* are too numerous to mention. See Coomaraswamy, "Primitive Mentality", in *Traditional Art and Symbolism*, Bollingen Series LXXXIX, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. 286-307.

- 40 See Roland Hall, "Dialectic", in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, pp. 385-389.
- 41 The concept of "unity of presence", i.e., of being and place, is fundamental to any discussion of Plotinian metaphysics. For an overview of the problem of presence, see Charles M. Sherover, *Heidegger, Kant, and Time*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971.
- 42 *sine cura*, from the Latin, *sine*, "without", and *cura*, "care", i.e., "without care" or "no apprehension". The best rendering of this most difficult principle is found in the literature of Taoism. The classic statement is by Lao Tzu:

*He grasps nothing and therefore he does not lose anything.  
Therefore the sage desires to have no desire.*

*He learns to be unlearned, and returns to what the multitude  
has missed (Tao).*

*Tao Te-Ching, Ch.64*

See Wing-Tsit Chan, "The Natural Way of Lao Tzu", in *A Source Book In Chinese Philosophy*, p. 170. In other words, both producer and perceiver do not concern themselves with aesthetics, i.e., science of the sensible; they are primarily *sine cura*; in the world, but not of the world.

We remain guarded here of succumbing to a type of psychologism, i.e., logical certainty as psychological certainty. A separated validity of an *urpassiv* mode of participation, distinct from any psychological predicate, seems appropriate. C.G. Jung terms that faculty of mind by which one is capable of gaining release from the claims of but one or the other of a pair of opposites the Transcendent Function. For Jung, it means a "mental process" comparable to a mathematical function of the same name. Jung advises that the Transcendent Function works through "symbolization" and "mythologization". See his essay, "The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche", in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. VIII, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953.

For an introduction to the Taoist concept of *wu-wei*, "action-non-action", see Peter Boodberg, "Philosophical Notes on Chapter One of the Lao Tzu", in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 20, (1957), pp. 598-618. See also the Commentary on Chuang Tsu, "Self Transformation and Taking No Action", in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary, New York: Columbia University Press, 1960, pp. 283-284.

- 43 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Merideth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. See also Salim Kemai, *Kant's Aesthetic Theory*, London: St. Martin's Press, 1992, and Howard Caygill, *The Art of Judgement*, Blackwell: Oxford, 1989. For Kant's "Table of Categories", see *Critique of Pure Reason*, (B 106), trans. Norman Kemp Smith, London, UK: Macmillan, 1929.

- 44 The term *mimesis*, "imitation", has existed since antiquity. However, conceptual references have changed. Modern understanding of term means little more than "to copy". Its earlier meaning was very different. Its etymology is obscure, but consensus suggests that the term originated as a description of the ritual mysteries of the Dionysian cult. *Mimesis* described the liturgical acts of the hierophant or priest.

*Mimesis* later came to denote the "reproducing of reality" in painting, sculpture and the theatre arts. It first applied to "dance", "mimicry" and "music" exclusively. *Mimesis* did not mean "imitation" or "reproduction", but was an expression of a lived participation with spiritual reality. The term subsequently moved from the terminology of cult into philosophy, where it came to mean "reproduction" or "imitation" of physical objects in the world.

The term *mimesis* therefore covers two meanings, "mimicry" and "production". See Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, "Mimesis", in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973, Vol. III, pp. 225-230. See also S.H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, New York: Dover Publications, 1951.

- 45 Modern phenomenological analysis of a scientifically derived humanism is undertaken by Martin Heidegger. See his "Letter on Humanism", in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrel Krell, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, pp. 193-242. See also *The Question of Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovit, New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- 46 Cf., Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, 3 Vols., Warszawa: PWN—Polish Scientific Publishers, 1970, Vol. I, p. 323.
- 47 The Scottish philosopher Edward Caird brought the idealism of G.W.F. Hegel into early twentieth century English philosophy and theology. A teacher at Glasgow and Oxford University, he was the most influential British exponent of German idealist philosophy. Caird advanced upon the "critical philosophy" of Immanuel Kant, and applied his principles both to philosophy and theology. He wrote two accounts of Kant. However, his greatest contribution to letters is his *The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers* to which I have referred for insight into the more difficult issues regarding Plotinus.

The greatest problem for philosophical theology is the relation of *theos* to human being. "Caird's philosophy was a form of speculative idealism, based on Kant but going beyond him. It was essentially a philosophy of reconciliation. The need for philosophy, he held, arises from the apparently irreconcilable opposition between different elements in our spiritual life — between subject and object, religion and science, freedom and determination, reason and desire. Unless we reconcile these antagonisms in a higher unity, we cannot achieve the spiritual harmony without which the highest achievements of man are impossible". See A.K. Stout, "Edward Caird" in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 4.

For a detailed exposition of the more important philosophical problems found in Plotinus, see Edward Caird, *The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers*, Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1904, Vol. 2, p. 267ff.

48 Edward Caird, op. cit., p. 267.

49 For an anthropological description of the operations of "pre-logical thinking" see Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *Fonctions Mentales dans les Sociétés Inférieures*, trans. Lilian A. Clare, *How Natives Think*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1926.

Levy-Bruhl found the *mythopoietic* mentality of "primitive cultures" to be "pre-logical". In contrast to the propositions of logic which guides itself by the "laws of contradiction", pre-logical thinking employs the "principle of participation". According to this principle any being or thing, in a way impossible for reason alone to grasp, can be both itself and something other than itself. The principle of *coincidentia oppositorum* or "coincidence of opposites" that holds to this manner of thinking opposes the Aristotelean principle of "non-contradiction". The principle of contradiction, which requires the clear distinctions so fundamental to our modern notions of "correct thinking", is simply not thought.

50 See Peter A. Bertocci, "Creation in Religion", in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 4 Vols., ed. Philip P. Wiener, New York: Scribner and Sons, 1974, Vol. I, pp. 571-589.

51 The term *Ungrund* comes from the Lutheran contemplative philosopher Jakob Boehme and perhaps is best defined as "pure potentiality". For Boehme the "abyss" is God considered as *Urgrund*, i.e., the undifferentiated and ineffable Absolute. Like Martin Buber after him, Berdyaev concludes that individual human being is never existentially alone, for we find ourselves always participating with others, always in communion with the image of God. See Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, trans. Natalie Duddington, London: G. Bles, 1937; *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie, London: Y. Gollancz 1955, and *Spirit and Reality*, London: G. Bles, 1946. See also Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, New York: Scribner, 1958, and *Between Man and Man*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

52 Edmund Husserl advances a "scientific" method for doing philosophy, i.e., "transcendental phenomenology". See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1931. See also *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*, ed. Donn Welton, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.

53 Wittgenstein's earlier philosophy is found in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Introduction by Bertrand Russell, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.



- 54 His later thinking is found in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations"*, known as the *"Blue and Brown Books"*, Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1958, and *Philosophical investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1953.

For Wittgenstein's discussion on the fundamental relationship between religion, art and culture, see his *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett, Oxford: Blackwell, 1966. Wittgenstein advances "correctness" or Ultimate Truth as that which is made immanent by the work of art. This he does in contrast to primacy given to Beauty by Plotinus. Wittgenstein images the Divine Intellect, whereas Plotinus images the Universal Soul. Ultimately, Wittgenstein concludes, the best place to start is the one that best suits the individual.

- 55 Cf., Paul Tillich, "Existential Aspects of Modern Art", in *Christianity and the Existentialists*, ed. Carl Michalson, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956, pp. 128-147.

- 56 *theurgy*, from the Greek *theos* and *ergon*, "divine work", is an occult art, often involving rites and incantations, for controlling divine and beneficent gods. Theurgy was practiced by the lesser Neoplatonists. Porphyry looked upon theurgy as a creative activity beyond human wisdom, not unlike the "tea ceremony" we find in Zen literature, and the "brush meditations" taken to Chinese painting. Iamblichus wrote on and supported the "theurgic mysteries". For a discussion of the "ritual of art" from within the context of *Mandala* making see Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask, New York: Pantheon Books, 1958.

- 57 See Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948, p. xv, and *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball, London: Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 5-8. Tillich brings a more analytic discussion to the fundamental relation between religion and culture.

According to the Christian view, *theos* offers a summons to humankind in ongoing history, i.e., bringing judgement upon history and transforming it. For Tillich, philosophical theology informs not only religion in the narrower sense, but also shapes the full range of our cultural institutions. In so demonstrating, he gives modern authority to the Plotinian claim that religion is the substance of culture and culture the form of religion. See Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, trans. N.A. Rasetzki and Elsa Talmey, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936, p. 50ff.

- 58 Cf., Paul Tillich, "Art and Ultimate Reality," in *Art and the Craftsman*, ed. Joseph Harned and Neil Goodwin, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1961, pp. 185-200, and *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball, London: Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 73.

- 59 *Ontoanalysis*, "being-analysis" and *logoanalysis*, "meaning-analysis", are the dialectical tools of Plotinian theory of art. The hermeneutical structure of one motivates the other.

Viktor Frankl tells us that the will to meaning is one of the basic driving forces in human life. "One's will to meaning can only be elicited if meaning itself can be elucidated as something which is essentially more than our mere self-expression. This implies a certain degree of objectiveness, and without a minimum amount of objectiveness meaning would never be found worthwhile to be filled. We do not just attach and attribute meaning to things, but rather find them; we do not invent them, we detect them". Viktor Frankl, "The Philosophical Foundations of Logotherapy", in *Psychotherapy and Existentialism*, New York: Washington Square Press, 1967, p. 15. See also *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, New York: Touchstone, 1984, and *The Will to Meaning*, New York: New American Library, 1970.

- 60 A systematic bibliography is provided by Richard Dufour, *Plotinus: A Bibliography 1950-2000*, Leiden: Brill, 2002. See also *Neoplatonism and Nature, Studies in Plotinus' Enneads*, International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, ed. Michael F. Wagner, New York: University of New York Press, 2002; *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought, Part I*, International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, ed. R. Baine Harris, New York: New York University Press, 2002; *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought, Part II*, International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, ed. R. Baine Harris, New York: New York University Press, 2002, and *Neoplatonism and Western Aesthetics*, International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, ed. Aphrodite Alexandrakis, New York: New York University Press, 2002.

Individual studies of interest are Aphrodite Alexandrakis, "Does Modern Art Reflect Plotinus' Notion of Beauty?", in *Neoplatonism and Nature, Studies in Plotinus' Enneads*, pp. 231-242, and "The Notion of Beauty in the Structure of the Universe: Pythagorean Influences", in *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought, Part II*, pp. 149-155.

See also A.H. Armstrong, "Plotinus on the Origin and Place of Beauty in Thought About the World" in *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought, Part II*, pp. 217-229, and W. Beierwaltes, "Some Remarks About the Difficulties of Realizing Neoplatonic Thought in Contemporary Philosophy and Art", in *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought, Part II*, pp. 269-284.

- 61 Nietzsche expounded his discovery that Apollonian reason was not the single source of great art. Art presents itself through the rational structures of Apollo who images its intellectual content, but also represents the passion of Dionysius who images its unreasoned content. Apollonian art is a "dream of rationality" in an irrational natural world.

Dionysian art tears the veil from appearances and allows one to see the underlying meaninglessness of the world. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

The literature of classical Taoism again serves our quest for an image that best serves as paradigm for the fundamental principles of art. The tenets of *yin yang* teach that all things and events are products of two principle elements. *Yin* is passive and irrational. *Yang* is active and rational. See "The Yin Yang School", in Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, pp. 244-250. For a practical demonstration of *yin yang* doctrine as applied to theory of art, see Mai-Mai Sze, *The Tao of Painting: A Study of The Ritual Disposition of Chinese Painting*, Bollingen Series XLIX, New York: Pantheon Books, 1956.

- 62 For a discussion of the Plotinian schema as process, see Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929. See also Ivor Leclerc, *Whitehead's Metaphysics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958. Leclerc's essays on "The Category of Process", pp. 68-70; "The Category of Prehension", pp. 144-148; "The Creative Process", pp. 209-211; "The Concrescence of Actual Entities", pp. 88-90; "The Category of The Ultimate: Creativity", pp. 81-87, and "God as an Actual Entity", pp. 192-194, are especially helpful.
- 63 For a modern exposition of the Plotinian approach to philosophy of identity see F.W.J von Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978. See also his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988. In his philosophy of mythology Schelling holds that myth shapes the "creative potentialities" of a culture. From within this context, he posits that nature as well as humankind undergoes mythological development. Ultimately, the Absolute becomes "primitive will to identity".
- 64 My reference to Eduard Spranger in n.13 above describes the "attitudes" or philosophical disposition we bring to ideas and things. See also J.R. Maze, "The Concept of Attitude", in *Inquiry*, Vol. 16, pp. 168-205.
- 65 The term *hieroglyph* is from the Greek, *hier*o, "sacred" and *glyph*, "carving", a sculpted mark or symbol. Also, the *hieroglyph*, one who makes hieroglyphic inscriptions, i.e., possessor of secret mysteries. It was the hieroglyph who first inscribed the pictograph sign that developed subsequently into a system of ideograms and picture writing. The hieroglyph sign is a figure or device having some hidden or esoteric meaning. It is a symbol of the idea itself, not the reasoned propositions of its discursive concepts.

- 66 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, London: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1959, p.11. Cf., Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958, pp. 7ff. The term *hierophany* is from the Greek, *hierō*, "sacred" or "holy", and *phany*, "appearance" or "manifestation", i.e., to show or make appear.

Suffice to say that the hierophany is a particular type of sign, a unique category of symbol. It is emblematic of its own object by virtue of the characteristics of its own self-possession.

- 67 For a discussion on the more pragmatic issues that attach to the operations of signs and symbols see Charles W. Morris, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1938. Pragmatics is the study of the relations between signs and their users, i.e., the modes of response to signs by those who use them. Modern iconology follows these principles.

- 68 Charles Sanders Peirce describes the "pure icon" as "a sign which refers to the object that it denotes merely by virtue of characteristics of its own." *Charles Sanders Peirce: Collected Papers*, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1931-35, Vol. II, par. 247.

"It may be said that religious symbols are the closest things we have to a Peircean icon". William P. Alston, "Sign and Symbol", in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, p. 441. Peirce strips the *eikōn* its religious significance, for he describes it as an object of a pragmatic semiotics. Eliade retains the original beauty of the term *eikōn*, respecting its etymological religious root when he describes the hierophany as manifestation of *theos*. One approach is through the sacred, the other is through the profane.

- 69 I have adopted the term *liminal* or "threshold experience" from the anthropology of Victor W. Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*", in *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, (1964), Washington: University of Washington Press, 1964, pp. 4-20.

- 70 Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of His Work", in Stephen Mackenna, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, p. cxxii.

- 71 The *numen* or "divine will" is the transcendent object of the numinous experience. When the theological concept of the *numen* and its schematizing concepts are brought together in this way, we have the "complex category" of the Holy.

Most of these concepts are familiar to theologians and phenomenologists of religion alike, but remain rather unsettling. For a more comprehensive analysis of the *numen* and its relation to things sacred and profane, see Rudolf Otto, *Religious Essays: A Supplement to the 'Idea of the Holy'*, trans. B. Lunn, London: Oxford University Press, 1931.

- 72 Cf., Moritz Geiger, *The Significance of Art*, Washington University Press; Washington, 1986, pp. 77-91.
- 73 For a Christian iconography of the "unity of *cosmos*", i.e., as "mirror of the world", see Émile Mâle, "Religious Art of the Thirteenth Century", in *Religious Art*, New York: The Noonday Press, 1949, pp. 61-98. The popular notion of art begins and ends here, in its iconographical and iconological descriptions.
- 74 Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, New York: Harper and Row, 1957, p. 2. Religion is defined by Tillich as the object of ultimate concern. Theory of art and theology grapple with the same "religious" questions. Both disciplines are related to ontological questions about the structure of meaning and to axiological questions of ultimate concern. The two are distinguishable in that the philosophical questions and answers tend to be posed and resolved in universal terms. That is to say, theological questions tend to be posed and resolved in universal terms and are answered in the terms of "revelation".
- 75 See George Mills, "Art: An Introduction to Qualitative Anthropology", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. XVI, No.1, (1957), pp. 1-17. Mills' summary of the structures that religion and culture bring to art is especially useful.
- 76 I take the phrase "deep solutions" from Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher who has written extensively on the problems of the "shallow" and the "deep", two "attitudes" brought to the problems of our modern world. See his "Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes", in Michael Tobias, *Deep Ecology*, San Marcos, California: Avant Books, 1984, pp. 256-270, and "Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises", in *The Ecologist*, Vol. 18, Nos. 4 / 5, 1988, pp. 128-131. See Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1957. Glacken surveys western orientations and attitudes toward nature and culture from ancient times to the end of the eighteenth century. See also John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1974, and his *Perfectibility of Man*, New York: Scribner & Sons, 1971.
- 77 Cf., Joseph Blauner, "Existential Analysis: Ludwig Binswagner's *Daseinanalyse*", in *Psychoanalytic Review*, 44, (1957), pp. 51-64. See also Joseph Needleman, *Being in The World: A Study in Binswagner's Psychology*, New York: Basic Books, 1963; H. Colm, "Healing as Participation: Comments on Paul Tillich's Existential Philosophy", in *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, 16, (1953), pp. 99-111.

- 78 See F.H. Hienemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953, pp. v, 15ff. Hienemann informs his reader that the central problem for modern civilization is technological alienation.
- 79 Cf., Martin Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?", in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 91-142.
- 80 See Leonid Ouspensky, *Theology of The Icon*, 2 Vols., trans. Anthony Gythiel, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978. The aesthetics of the icon includes more than the transfiguration of *anthropos* and the sanctification of art. It is a fundamental element in the entire body of the Christian Orthodox tradition. It is a serious approach to the sacred idea it images.
- 81 Our discovery of a Plotinian studio program especially instructive for the painter is corroborated by Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz. He has outlined its basic canons in a manner that fully concurs with my own findings. I have, therefore, followed the manner in which he has succinctly outlined its procedures. Cf., Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, Warszawa: PWN – Polish Scientific Publishers, 1970, Vol. I, pp. 323-324.
- 82 I would like to clarify what I mean by the term "sur-real". The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term as deriving from the Old French; *sur* - "earlier", "over", "above", i.e., overflow or beyond; and, *real* - "objective existence", i.e., actually existing as a thing. Thus, actually existing or present as a state or quality of things, i.e., actually occurring or happening; and, that which is actually true as its name implies, i.e., possessing the essential qualities denoted by its name. In Philosophy, applied to whatever is regarded as having an existence in fact, and not merely in appearance, thought, or language, or as having an absolute and necessary, in contrast to a merely contingent, existence. *Real*, i.e., defined from within its sociological context is rendered as *Sincere*; from the Latin, *sincer* - "clean", "pure". or "sound"; i.e., true, correct, not falsified or perverted in any way. Thus, characterized by the absence of all dissimulation or pretence, i.e., honest, straightforward. Thus, a *sur-realist* is defined as an "extreme realist", i.e., one who occupies himself with things rather than words; and, that which is characterized by artistic or literary realism, i.e., representing things as they really are.

The term "sur-real" therefore has two connotations: a) An image or form that is essentially, "more real", i.e., some being or thing which transcends the natural reality of our real world, and b) That which refers to a particular manner of thinking, or mode of thought.

As the term relates to the movement in art called Surrealism, see Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism*, New York: McCraw-Hill, 1971, pp. 11-12. In his Introduction, "The Paths of Surrealism: The Word", Waldberg quotes from the *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924):

SURREALISM: Noun, masc., pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.

ENCYCL: Philos; Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipresence of the dream, and in the disinterested play of thought. It leads to the permanent destruction of all psychic mechanisms and to its substitution for them in the solution of the principal problems of life.

Waldberg adds, "But it should not be forgotten that although it is in painting, sculpture, and the object that the surrealist idea found its most striking application, surrealism at its inception was intended to be a way of thinking, a way of feeling and a way of life." (ibid., p. 12). An Italian cousin to Surrealism, *Pittura Metafisica*, was also born of a revolt against a rationalist or discursive approach to art. Founded by two artists of genius, Carlo Carra and Giorgio de Chirico, metaphysical art sets out to recover a "sur-real" sense of wonder and mystery. The essay by Giorgio de Chirico titled "On Metaphysical Art" clarifies for us the intentional reference of this new movement in art. See, Massimo Carra, *Metaphysical Art*, New York: Praeger, 1979, pp. 87-91. De Chirico creates the metaphysical picture:

But the scene would not have changed, it would be I who would see it from a different angle. And here we have arrived at the metaphysical aspect of things. One can deduce and conclude that every object has two aspects: one current one which we see nearly always and which is seen by men in general, and the other which is spectral and metaphysical and seen only by rare individuals in moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical abstraction. Only in the new Italian metaphysical painting does the second solitude appear: solitude of signs, or the metaphysical.

The appearance of a metaphysical work of art is serene; it gives the impression, however, that something new must happen amidst this same serenity, and that other signs apart from those already apparent are about to enter the rectangle of the canvas. Such is the revealing symptom of the "inhabited depth". For this reason the flat surface of a perfectly calm ocean disturbs us, not so much because of the idea of the measurable distance between us and the sea bed, but more because of all the elements of the unknown hidden in that depth. Otherwise we would feel only a vertiginous sensation similar to that experienced at a great height. (ibid., p. 90).

Metaphysical art is not a formal movement or style. It represents a way of thinking. For the visual artist it is the plastic reappraisal of reality.

- 83 See Herschel Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1971; Robert L. Herbert, *Modern Artists on Art*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964. See also Wassily Kandinsky, "On the Spiritual in Art", in *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall, 1982; Kasimir Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1915-1933*, trans. Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin, ed. Troels Anderson, New York: Wittenborn Books, 1971, and André Breton, *Manifeste du Surréalisme*, trans. Richard Weaver and Helen R. Lane, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974.

Plotinus is new in an ancient sort of way. Ancient paradigms are preserved in a theory of art that advances new criteria for its transcendental operations. For an interesting approach to the perennial debate between "aesthetics of the ideal", and "aesthetics of the sensible", see Leo Steinberg, "The Eye is Part of the Mind" (1953), in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 289-306. Steinberg records that the modern debate is between André Malraux and Giorgio Vasari, the Renaissance compiler and philosopher of art history. Steinberg describes Malraux as arguing the Plotinian point of view, and Vasari following arguments advanced by Aristotle. Steinberg concludes his essay by saying, "It can hardly be too often repeated that the modernist repudiates the Aristotelean principle 'Art is Imitation'". (ibid., p. 291) Steinberg reminds us of the famous Plotinian maxim, "We dare not keep ourselves set toward the images of sense". (ibid., n.7, p. 298)

- 84 The cosmogony that art establishes is eternally present. It is not a beginning, since all beginning is linked with time. The present is not just the now moment of the everyday. It is ever-originating, an achievement of full integration and continuous renewal. The painter who is able to concretize and affect both the origin and the present supercedes an aesthetics of the mere here and now. For a comprehensive discussion of the historical foundations that ground Plotinian theory of art as an attempt at the concretion of the aperspectival, see Jean Gebser, *The Ever-Present Origin*, trans. Noel Barstad with Algis Mickunas, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985. Gebser brings a wealth of anthropological, mythological, linguistic, philosophical and artistic learning to the subject of theory of art, religion and human creativity.

